

The Motor Girls On Crystal Bay



The Motor Girls' Series

BY

Margaret Penrose

The adventures of Cora Kimball and her friends are many and varied. They go on auto tours, spend vacations by the seashore and even take a yachting trip to the West Indies.

While their adventures are exciting enough for the veriest tomboy, the distinctive feminine appeal is not lacking.

Cora and her friends are, in the final analysis, just wholesome, everyday girls. In spite of their unusual adventures their daily lives are filled with the sort of activity that every girl knows and enjoys.

They design clothes, they shop for the newest in hats and they give marvelously clever parties.

What girl doesn't enjoy these things? What girl doesn't enjoy reading about them?

to Mildred Seibert
from Mother

Dec. 25, 1929

THE MOTOR GIRLS ON CRYSTAL BAY

Or

The Secret of the Red Oar

BY

MARGARET PENROSE



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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A WORRIED GIRL	I
II. FREDA'S STORY	15
III. CRYSTAL BAY	26
IV. THE RED OAR	36
V. TWO MEN	47
VI. THE "CHELTON"	55
VII. IN THE MOTELY MOTE	67
VIII. FRIGHTS OR FANCIES	76
IX. A MERRY TIME	83
X. TWO MUCH JOY	93
XI. THE RESCUE	102
XII. THE CALM	109
XIII. SUSPICION	120
XIV. AN ANGRY DRUGGIST	129
XV. AN ALARM	141
XVI. A BAD CASE OF NERVES	156
XVII. A LITTLE RACE	164
XVIII. MORE SUSPICIONS	171
XIX. ODD TALK	176
XX. THE NIGHT PLOT	184

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXI.	THE BREAKDOWN	196
XXII.	AT THE CABIN	202
XXIII.	UNEXPECTED HELP	208
XXIV.	DENNY'S SOLILOQUY	214
XXV.	THE PLOTTERS ARRIVE	220
XXVI.	CORA'S BRAVE RESOLVE	227
XXVII.	THE RED OAR AGAIN	235
XXVIII.	THE DISCOVERY—CONCLUSION	241

THE MOTOR GIRLS ON CRYSTAL BAY

CHAPTER I

A WORRIED GIRL

FOUR girls sat on four chairs, in four different corners of the room. They sat on the chairs because they were really too tired to stand longer, and the reason for the occupancy of the corners of the apartment was self-evident. There was no other available space. For the centre of the chamber was littered to overflowing with trunks, suitcases and valises, in various stages of being packed, and from them overflowed a variety of garments and other accessories of a journey.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Cora Kimball, as she gazed helplessly about, "will we ever be finished, Bess?"

"I don't know," was the equally discouraging reply. "It doesn't seem so; does it?"

"I'm sure I can't get another thing in my suitcase," spoke the smallest girl of all, who seemed to shrink back rather timidly into her corner, as

2 THE MOTOR GIRLS ON CRYSTAL BAY

though she feared she might be put into a trunk by mistake.

"Oh, Marita! You simply must get more in your suitcase!" exclaimed Cora, starting up. "Why, your trunk won't begin to hold all the rest of your things unless you crowd more into the case."

"The only trouble, Cora," sighed Marita, "is that the sides and top aren't made of rubber."

"There's an idea!" cried a plump girl, in the corner nearest the piano. "A rubber suitcase! What a boon it would be for week-ends, when one starts off with a Spartan resolution to take only one extra gown, and ends up with slipping two party dresses and the 'fixings' into one's trunk. Oh, for a rubber suitcase!"

"What's the sense in sighing after the impossible?" asked the girl opposite the plump one. "Why don't you finish packing, Bess?"

"Why don't you?" and the plump one rather glared at her more frail questioner.

"Now, sisters!" cautioned Cora, as she gazed at the Robinson twins, "don't get on one another's nerves. Let's have another try at it. I'm sure if we go at it with some sort of system we'll be able to get all the things in. And really we must hurry!" she exclaimed, looking at the clock on the mantel, which pointed to the hour of four. "I

promised to have all the baggage ready for the man at five. That only gives us an hour——”

“Cora Kimball!”

“Only an hour!”

“Why didn’t you tell us?”

Thus the three girls exclaimed in startled tones as they fairly leaped from their chairs in their respective corners, and caught up various garments.

Then, as the apparent hopelessness of the situation overcame them again, they looked at one another, at the trunks and suitcases that already held their fair share of articles, at the accumulation on the floor, and then they sighed in concert.

“It’s no use,” spoke Bess Robinson. “I’m not going at all—at least not now. I’m going to take another day to sort out the things I really don’t need.”

“You can’t!” exclaimed Cora. “Our tickets are bought, the bungalow is engaged, and we leave for Crystal Bay on the morning train, if we have to ship this whole room by freight—just as it is!”

“Perhaps that would be the easiest way,” suggested timid Marita Osborne.

“It certainly would create a sensation in Chelton,” murmured Belle, as she looked at her plump sister. “But come, we really must help you, Cora. It’s too bad we took advantage of your good na-

4 THE MOTOR GIRLS ON CRYSTAL BAY

ture, and brought our things here to pack. We might better have done it at our own homes."

"No, I think you'll find my way best in the end," said Cora, with a smile, as she looked about for a place in which to pack her sweater. "By doing this we won't duplicate on the extras. Now, girls, try once more. Marita, let's begin on your suitcase, for that seems to be the smallest. Oh, dear, Bess, what are you doing now?" she called, as she noted an unusual activity on the part of the plump girl.

"I'm just seeing if I'm heavy enough to close the lid of my trunk," was the answer. "No, I'm not," she exclaimed, as she hopped on and hopped off again.

"Look out!" called Belle. "You nearly stepped on my veil-box, Bess."

"Sorry, Sis, but you shouldn't leave it on the floor."

The plump one stood looking at the bulging trunk, and then drew a long breath.

"Girls!" she cried, "I'm losing weight."

"How do you know?" asked her sister promptly.

"Couldn't close my trunk lid. That's the way I can always tell. Problem: Given a trunk, which requires a force of one hundred and thirty-five pounds to close down the lid, and a girl of one hundred and fifteen, how many chocolates must

the said girl eat before she is heavy enough to close the lid? Answer—one pound, and here's for a starter," saying which pretty, plump Bess rummaged in a pile of her belongings until she found what she was after. Then, sinking down in a heap of silk petticoats she began munching bonbons with a contented air.

"Bess Robinson!" gasped Cora. "You're never going to do that; are you?"

"Do what?" came with an innocent air.

"Sit there and eat chocolates until you're heavy enough to close down the lid of your trunk."

"I might as well. I can't check it open that way, and I can't close it at my present weight. I need everything I've squeezed into it; and so what else can I do?"

"If we could only get someone to help us," said Marita, innocently, seeming to take Bess literally. "One of the boys——"

She was interrupted by the laughter of the others, for Marita was a newcomer in Chelton, and though Cora and her chums had taken her up, attracted by her nice ways, Marita did not yet appreciate her new friends.

"Don't mind what Bess says, my dear," spoke Cora, as she saw that Marita was a little hurt at the laughter. "As for the boys, please don't suggest such a thing. If they came in now, we'd never get through packing. I hope——"

6 THE MOTOR GIRLS ON CRYSTAL BAY

"All hope abandon, ye who enter here!" declaimed a voice in the doorway, and the faces of two young men peered in.

"Too late!" exclaimed Cora, as she saw her brother Jack and his chum, Walter Pennington. "The boys are here! Any more of you, Jack?" she asked, as she crowded some feminine finery out of sight behind her back.

"No. Why?"

"Because I'm going to give general orders for you to depart at once, and I want to include everyone. Begone!"

"Heartless one!" murmured Walter, sliding into the room under Jack's arm. "Just when we came to help you, too!"

"Here!" called Bess, from her position, Turkish fashion, amid a billowy pile of garments, "Help me up first, Wallie, my dear, and then sit on my trunk."

"Why, is that the throne seat?" he asked, as he extended his hand, and pretended to find it extremely difficult to lift Bess to her feet.

"No, but the lid needs closing, and I can't do it. Sit on it, that's a good fellow," and she extended to him a chocolate from the tips of her fingers, which fingers Walter pretended to bite.

"Now you really must go," said Cora, seriously, when Walter had managed to close the trunk.

"Come, Jack, we have to get through by five

o'clock," and she glanced at her brother, who was in earnest conversation with Marita in her corner.

Jack paid no attention to his sister, and Walter was somewhat surprised to see Bess, after looking with satisfaction at the trunk he had closed for her, open it again.

"Well, I like that!" he exclaimed, with pretended indignation, "after me nearly breaking my back to close that lid——"

"I just wanted the things compressed, Walter dear," said Bess, sweetly. "I've got a lot more to put in, and I couldn't squeeze in another piece until they had been crowded down a bit. Now run along, little boy."

"Come on, Jack!" called Walter, as he turned to go. "We have been insulted!"

"They can't insult me," murmured Jack, never turning to look at his chum. "Don't be so thin-skinned, Wal. I'm having a good time."

Cora's girl chums looked at her.

"Jack, you must go!" she insisted. "Please do. I should think you boys would have lots to do to get ready, too."

"All done, Sis," murmured Jack. "We always travel in light marching order, and sleep on our arms," and he bent closer to the blushing Marita.

Cora bit her lip. Really she was provoked at Jack this time. She and her chums were in the

midst of packing for their annual Summer trip, and to be interrupted this way, at the last critical moment, was provoking.

"Jack!" she began. "I shall tell mother——"

"What's he been doing now?" asked a new voice, and with a gesture of despair Cora turned to see another young man in the doorway.

"Come on in, Ed," called Jack. "Didn't know you were in town. You're just in time to assist."

"What's it all about?" asked the newcomer. "Are you going or coming?" he inquired, as he looked at the partially-filled suitcases and trunks.

"Both," answered Walter. "You're coming and they're going."

"Good!" was the comment. "Hello, Cora—Bess—Belle——" He paused as he nodded to each of the girls, and looked questioningly at Marita in the corner with Jack.

"Oh, excuse me," murmured Cora. "Miss Osborne, let me present to you Mr. Edward Foster—just plain Ed, mostly."

"The plainer the better," observed the newcomer, as he bowed to Marita. "But what's it all about, Jack?—No, there's no use asking him," he murmured as he noted Cora's brother resuming his interrupted conversation with the little girl. "Will someone please enlighten me?"

"It's our annual flitting," sighed Cora. "And really half the pleasure is taken away with this

packing. Well, as long as you boys are here you might as well make yourselves useful, as well as ornamental."

"Delighted!" cried Walter, looking about. "Where shall I put this?" and he caught up a box from the floor.

"Be careful!" cried Belle. "You'll spill it!"

"Candy?" he asked questioningly, as he rattled the contents.

"My manicure set, and you'll have it all upset. Give it here!" went on the owner, and Walter surrendered it.

"No, but seriously, what's it all about?" he asked. "I've just come home."

"We girls have taken a bungalow at Crystal Bay," explained Cora. "We're due there tomorrow, leaving on the early morning train. The boys, that is, Jack and Walter, are to have a tent near us, and they're supposed to go with us in the morning. But unless they're further along with their packing than we are——"

Cora shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"Don't worry, Sis, we are!" Jack threw at her, without turning his head.

"Camping at Crystal Bay—that sounds good," murmured Ed, who liked life in the open.

"Can't you come along, old man?" asked Walter. "We've got plenty of room, and we were counting on you later, when you got back from

your trip. Now, as long as you're here, can't you come with us?"

"I don't know but what I could. Yes, I will. I haven't anything on. I'll go home and pack up right away. You leave in the morning? I guess I can make it."

"Well, when you go, please take them with you," and Cora indicated her brother and Walter. "Then we'll be able to go on with our packing. Really, Jack," and she spoke most seriously this time, "you must go!"

"All right, Sis!" he agreed. "Don't forget," he added, to Marita, as he rose.

"What nonsense has he been telling you now?" asked Belle with a laugh. "Don't believe him, Marita."

"Don't tell!" cautioned Jack. "It's a secret!"

Somehow the boys were gotten out of the room, and somehow the girls managed to get through with their packing in time for the expressman.

From the Kimball home driveway the expressman drove with the baggage, and soon the trunks were rattling down the main street of Chelton, that pretty New England town, nestling in a bend of the Chelton River.

"Well, that's over, thank goodness!" sighed Cora, as she saw the baggage safely off. "Now to get ourselves ready for morning. You girls will take supper with me."

"Oh, that's too much," protested Belle.

"No, really it isn't. I've told mamma, and she is counting on you. But I'm too excited to eat much."

"So am I," chorused the others.

"And I'm so anxious to see our new motor boat!" added Bess, for the girls had purchased one that had been sent on ahead to Crystal Bay.

"I do hope Ed can go," murmured Belle. "He's such good company."

"Yes, I like him, too," confessed Marita, with a blush, at which the others laughed.

The boys came over to the Kimball home that evening, Jack having dined with Walter Pennington. Ed came also, to say that he could go, and then the young people talked over plans for Summer fun, until the chiming of the clock warned the girls, at least, that they must separate if they were to get up early the next morning.

"Lottie Weaver will meet us at the station," said Cora, referring to another of the party, who had not assisted at the packing.

"That's good. If we had had her trunk over here, with all our things, we'd never have gotten the baggage off," said Bess, with a sigh.

"And now, after it's all over," said Cora to her mother that night, "I think I would not again have all the packing done in one place. I thought it would save time for the girls to bring their

things here, especially as the Robinsons are so upset with building that addition to the parlor. But it was a lot of work!"

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Kimball, "you meant it for the best, my dear. I'm sure you will have a pleasant Summer."

They met at the station the next morning—the girls and boys. Lottie Weaver was there, in the glory of a new maroon sweater, and Ed Foster was also on time.

The express for Crystal Bay was late, and as Cora and her motor girl chums marched up and down the platform, nervously waiting, Cora saw a girl coming from the waiting room.

"Why, Freda Lewis!" she exclaimed, hurrying up and putting her arms about her. "What are you doing here? I thought you were going back to Bar Harbor for the Summer."

"So we were! Oh, Cora! I'm so glad to see you. I had to change cars here—I got on the wrong train, it seems. I've been traveling all night."

"You look it, my dear! Oh, if I had only known you were here——"

"I haven't been waiting long. I'm to take the Shore Express."

"That's our train. But, Freda, you don't look at all well—not a bit as you did at school," for

Freda was a chum Cora had made much of a year or so before, but had not seen of late.

"I'm not well, Cora," said Freda, earnestly.

"What is the trouble?"

"Anxiety, mostly. Oh, Cora, we've had such a dreadful time, mother and I!"

Her voice trembled pitifully.

"Freda, dear, what is the matter?" asked Cora in sympathetic tones, for she saw tears in the other's eyes.

"Oh, it's money matters. You know we own—or at least we thought we did—a large tract of land at Crystal Bay."

"Crystal Bay!" exclaimed Cora, in surprise.

"Yes. It was Grandfather Lewis's homestead. Well, most of our income has come from that since father's death, and now—Oh, I don't know all the details, but some land speculators—land sharks, mother calls them—are disputing our title.

"Mother has just worried herself sick over it, and I'm afraid she is going into nervous prostration. I've been to see some distant relatives about the matter, but I can't do anything. I'm so sorry for dear little mother. If she should break down——"

Poor, worried Freda could not go on. Cora held her close and the thought came to her that Freda herself was on the verge of a nervous break-

down. The girl had changed very much from the happy, laughing chum of a year before.

"Freda, dear, tell me more about it," murmured Cora. "Perhaps I can help—I have friends—Jack and I——"

"Here comes the train!" interrupted Jack. "Come on, Cora!"

"I must see you again, Freda," said Cora, hastily. "I'll look for you on the train. I've got to get my party together. Don't forget—I'll see you again!" and, wondering what was the cause of her friend's worry, Cora hastened up the platform, toward her companions, while the train steamed noisily in.

CHAPTER II

FREDA'S STORY

"WELL, are we all here?"

"Count noses!"

"Did anybody lose anything?"

"If it's a pocketbook it's mine!"

"Especially if it has money in it!"

Thus the motor girls, and their boy friends, sent merry quip and jest back and forth as they found seats in the coach, and settled down for the trip to Crystal Bay. Cora, after making sure that the girls had comfortable seats, and noting that Jack had pre-empted the place beside Marita, leaned over Bess and whispered:

"I'm going back in the next car for a little while."

"What for?"

"Did you lose anything?" asked Belle, who overheard what Cora said.

"No, but you saw me talking to that girl on the platform; didn't you?"

"Yes, and I wondered who she was," remarked Bess.

"She was Freda Lewis."

"Freda Lewis! Why, I never would have known her!"

"Nor I!" added Belle. "How she has changed! Of course you were more intimate with her than we were, Cora; but she certainly doesn't seem to be the same girl."

"She isn't," replied Cora. "She and her mother are in trouble—financial trouble. I'm going back and talk to her. I want to help her if I can."

And while Cora is thus bent on her errand of good cheer, it may not be out of place, for the benefit of my new readers, to tell a little something more about the characters of this story, and how they figured in the preceding books of this series.

To begin with the motor girls, there were three of them, though friends and guests added to the number at times. Somehow, in speaking of the motor girls, I always think of Cora Kimball first. Perhaps it is because she was rather of a commanding type. She was a splendid girl, tall and dark. Her mother was a wealthy widow, who for some years had made her home in the quiet New England town of Chelton, where she owned valuable property. And, while I am at it, I might mention that Jack was Cora's only brother, the three forming the Kimball household.

Bess and Belle Robinson were twins, the

daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Perry Robinson. Mr. Robinson was a wealthy railroad man, associated with large metropolitan interests.

Bess, Belle and Cora had been chums since their motoring days began, when Cora had been given a car, and, after some persuasion, Mr. Robinson also had bought one for his daughters.

I think I have already intimated that Bess was plump and rosy—a little too plump, she herself admitted at times. Her sister was just the opposite—tall and willowy, so that the two formed quite a contrast.

Marita Osborne was a newcomer in Chelton, who had soon won her way into the hearts of the motor girls, so much so that Cora had invited her to come to the bungalow at Crystal Bay.

Each year Cora and her chums sought some new form of Summer vacation pleasure, and this time they had decided on the seashore, in a quiet rather old-fashioned resort, which the girls, on a preliminary inspection trip, had voted most charming. In fact they went into such raptures over it that Jack and his chums had decided to go there also. So the boys and girls would be together.

Speaking of the boys, the two who will come in for the most consideration will be Walter Pennington and Ed Foster. Walter was perhaps a closer chum of Jack's than was Ed, the former attending Exmouth College with Jack, where, of late, Ed

had taken a post-graduate course. Ed was considered quite a sportsman, and was fond of hunting and fishing.

The first book of this series, entitled "The Motor Girls," tells how Cora became possessed of her car, the *Whirlwind*, and what happened after she got it. In that powerful machine she and her girls chums unraveled a mystery of the road in a manner satisfactory to themselves and many others.

When the motor girls went on a tour, they made a strange promise—or rather Cora did—and how she kept it you will find fully set forth in the second volume. In the third you may read of the doings of the girls at Lookout Beach, where came two runaways whom Cora befriended. The runaways were two girls—but there, I must not spoil the story for you by telling you their secret.

Going through New England in their cars, the motor girls had a strange experience with the gypsies, as set forth in the fourth volume. Cora was in dire straits for a time, but with her usual good luck, and her good sense, she finally turned the situation to the advantage of herself and her chums.

Motoring so appealed to the girls that when they got the chance to change from the land to the water they eagerly took it. Cora became the owner of a fine motor boat, and in the story "The Motor

Girls on Cedar Lake," you may read of what she and her friends did with their craft. The hermit of Fern Island had much to be thankful for, after meeting Cora, who did him a great service.

Longing for wider waters in which to display their skill as amateur motor-boatists, the girls went to the coast the Summer following their experiences on Cedar Lake, and there they found the waif from the sea. Again did Cora and her chums take advantage of an opportunity to befriend an unfortunate.

The experiences of that Summer were talked of nearly all of the following Winter. Now warm weather had come again, and with it the desire to be flitting to a watering place. Crystal Bay, as I have said, was selected, and of the start for that place I have already told.

Cora, walking back through the coaches, looking from side to side for Freda, found herself wondering what had caused the sudden change in her former companion.

"She was considered well-off at school," murmured Cora, as she saw her friend half way down the second coach, "but she never appeared fond of money. Now the loss of it seems to have changed her terribly. I wonder if it can be—just money?"

Cora reached the seat where Freda was, with her face turned toward the window.

"Well, I am here, you see," announced Cora, pleasantly. "I left them to shift for themselves a while. They do seem to depend so much on me."

"That's because you are always doing things for others," said Freda, and there was a suspicious brightness in her eyes.

"Then I hope I can do something for you!" exclaimed Cora, earnestly. "Come, Freda, dear, tell me your troubles—that is, if you would like to," she added quickly, not wishing to force a confidence for which the other might not be ready.

"Oh, Cora, dear, of course you know I want to—it isn't that! Only I don't like to pile my worries on you."

"Go on—it always helps to tell someone else. Who knows but what I may help you. Is it a real worry, Freda?"

"So real that sometimes I am afraid to think about it!"

There was no mistaking the girl's fear. She looked over her shoulder as though she expected to see some unpleasant object, or person.

"Suppose you begin at the beginning," suggested Cora, with a smile. "Then I'll know what we are talking of."

"I don't know what the beginning was," said Freda slowly, "but I can almost see the—ending," and she seemed to shiver. "But where are you going, Cora, you and your friends?" she asked.

"I must not be selfish and talk only about myself."

"We are going to Crystal Bay."

"Crystal Bay! How odd, just where mother is, and where I am going. Then I shall see you often."

"I hope so," murmured Cora. "We have a cute little bungalow, and the boys—my brother and his chums—will use a tent. But I want to hear more about your trouble. Really, Freda, you do look quite ill."

"Perhaps that is partly because I have been traveling all night. It is always so wearying. But my chief cause of anxiety is for mother. She is really on the verge of a breakdown, the doctor says. Oh, if anything happens to her——"

"Don't think of it," urged Cora. "Perhaps it will help you if you tell me some particulars."

"I will," said Freda, bravely. "It is this way. My grandfather was a pioneer land-owner of a large tract at Crystal Bay. It came to us, after papa died, and we lived well on the income from it, for there was much farm land besides the big house we lived in. But a month or so ago a big land company, that wants to get our property for a factory site, filed a claim against us, saying we had no good title to the estate. They said certain deeds had not been filed, and that we were only trespassers, and must get off."

"And did you go?" asked Cora, with deep interest.

"Not yet, but I am afraid we'll have to. You see these men took the matter to court. They got an injunction, I think it is called. Anyhow, it was some document that forbade the people who rent the land from us from paying us any more money until the case was settled. And, as we depend on the rents for our living—well, you see we haven't any living now, to speak of," and Freda tried to smile through her tears.

"Oh, that's a shame!" cried Cora, impulsively. "And can nothing be done?"

"We have tried, mother and I. But we really have no money to hire lawyers, and neither have any of what few friends and relations there are left. I have just been on a quest of that kind, but it was not successful.

"There are supposed to be some documents—deeds, mortgages, or something like that, in existence, and if we could only get hold of them we might prove our claim, and force the men to let us have our rent money again. But until we get those papers——"

Freda paused suggestively.

"Oh, I wish I could think of a way to help you!" murmured Cora. "I can see you have been suffering!"

"I don't mind so much about myself," said

Freda, bravely, "but I am really more worried about mother than I am about the property. If worst came to worst I could go to work, but mother has taken so to heart the actions of the land sharks! She never was strong, you know. You met her; did you not?"

"I think not, but perhaps I may have done so. Now, Freda, I am going to help you!"

Cora spoke enthusiastically.

"Are you? How?" asked the other, eagerly.

"I don't just know how, but I am. First I'm going to think this over, and then I'm going to talk about it with Jack. He has a friend—Ed Foster—who knows something about law. We may be able to get ahead of these land sharks yet."

"Oh, I hope so!" gasped Freda, with a fond look at Cora. "It is so good of you to bother with poor me."

"And why shouldn't I?" asked Cora. "You look as though you needed bothering with. Take care that you don't break down, too, Freda."

"I shall keep up. I must, for mother's sake. Oh, but those men were positively brutal when they told her she had no right to grandfather's property! But it has done me good to talk to you, Cora dear."

"I am glad of it. You look better already. Now wouldn't you like to come forward and meet

some of the girls? You know the Robinson twins, anyhow."

"Yes, I know them. But I don't want to see anyone just yet. Later on, perhaps. I just want to rest, and think. It was awfully good of you to come to me. We shall see each other at Crystal Bay."

"Oh, indeed we shall. Well, then, if you won't come I'll go back to my friends. Now don't forget—I'm going to help you, Freda!"

"Oh, that's so good of you! I feel more hope and courage now. I—I feel like—fighting those land sharks!" and Freda clenched her little hands as though the struggle to come would be a physical one.

With a reassuring pat on Freda's shoulder Cora left her friend, to go to her chums in the other coach. She found them about to organize a searching party to look for her, and they clamored for the reason for her desertion.

She told them something of Freda's story, and Ed Foster promised to talk the matter over with Mrs. Lewis later, and see if he could give any legal aid.

"It's too bad!" exclaimed Bess. "There ought to be a law to punish such men."

"There probably are laws," said Cora, "but the trouble is there are so many laws that bad men can often use them for their own ends."

“Bravo, Portia. A Daniel come to judgment!” cried Ed. “With you on her side, Freda is sure to win!”

But, though the motor girls tried to be merry, the little cloud of Freda's trouble overshadowed them all the way to Crystal Bay.

CHAPTER III

CRYSTAL BAY

"HERE we are!"

"Where's the bungalow?"

"Me for that motor boat of Cora's!" cried Jack.

"No, you don't!" exclaimed his sister. "Not till I try her first."

They had alighted at the station, and there was the confusion that always follows engaging a carriage and seeing that the baggage has safely arrived. Cora found time to slip off for a minute and whisper words of cheer to Freda. Then she rejoined her chums, and made ready for the trip to the bungalow.

The boys, with a fine disregard of housekeeping responsibilities, were already making plans to go fishing that afternoon, having spied a man who took out parties in his launch.

But finally order came out of chaos. The girls found themselves at their bungalow, surrounded by their belongings. The boys, after seeing that their possessions were piled in the tent, slipped on

their oldest garments and began overhauling their fishing tackle.

"Aren't you going to do anything toward getting a meal?" asked Cora of Jack, as she went over to the tent to borrow a corkscrew with which to open some olives.

"We thought maybe you'd ask us over," he answered, craftily, as he adjusted a reel on his rod.

"Oh, Jack!" she cried. "We can't! We've got so much to unpack. Besides, we're only going to have a light lunch now."

"A *light* lunch! Excuse me. I know—crackers, pickles and olives. Never! We'll go to the town delicatessen, sister mine!"

"Thank goodness there is one," murmured Cora.

She hastened back to the bungalow. And then began a series of strenuous happenings.

Somehow trunks and suitcases were unpacked; somehow rooms were picked out, rejected, taken again, and finally settled on. Then, between the nibblings at the crackers and pickles Jack had despised, the girls settled down, and at last had time to admire the place they had selected for their Summer stay.

A woman had been engaged to open the bungalow for them, and she had provided most of the necessaries of life, aside from those the girls

brought with them. Cora and her chums had been satisfied to have her attend to everything from buying food to providing an oil stove on which to cook it.

There were a number of conveniences at Crystal Bay. Stores were not out of reach, and supplies could be procured with little trouble. A trip across the bay brought one to the shores of a real village, with school house, post-office and other accessories of civilization. A trip down the bay opened into eel pots in August, bluefishing in September and deep sea fishing later on, when the Summer colonists had departed.

Very early in the morning after the arrival of the motor girls at Crystal Bay, house, tent and bungalow were deserted—it was all a matter of motor boat. Moored to the brand new dock, at Tangle Turn, a brand new motor craft heaved with the incoming waves and tugged at its ropes whenever a sufficiently strong motion of the water gave it excuse to attempt an escape.

This was the *Chelton*, the “up-to-datest” little-big motor boat possible to own or acquire, according to the verdict of the young men from Chelton who had just now passed judgment, and the wise decision of Cora and her girl friends who had actually bought the boat, after having taken a post-graduate course in catalogs and hardware periodicals, to say nothing of the countless inter-

views they had found it necessary to hold with salesmen and yacht agents.

They were all there, even Freda, who declared she ought to be busy with other matters, but that the call of the colony was too strong for her that one morning, at least.

"Of course we know how to run her," insisted Cora to Ed, the latter having expressed doubt as to the girls' ability to manage so important a craft. "Didn't we run the *Pet*?"

"Oh, yes, but this—this is a deep-sea boat," Ed explained, "and you might run yourselves away to other shores."

"And land on a desert island? What sport!" exclaimed Lottie, to whom motor boating was an entirely new experience. "I hope we make it Holland. I have always longed to see a real, live Holland boy. The kind who are all clothes and wooden shoes."

"We might make one up for you," suggested Belle. "I think Wallie would look too cute for anything in skirty trousers and polonaise shirts. Just let his locks grow a little—Look out there, Bess! That's water around the boat. It only looks like an oil painting. It's real—wet!"

Bess was climbing over the dock edge, and of course the boys could not allow her that much exercise without pretending that she was in danger of going overboard. After the unhooked

the hem of her sister's skirt from an iron bolt, thereby giving Bess a sudden drop to the deck of the *Chelton*, however, Bess declared she knew water when she saw it, and also the difference between a water color and an oil painting.

"What did you call her *Chelton* for?" asked Walter. "I thought you decided to take the name from the first remark the first stranger should make about her."

"Yes, and what do you think that was?" laughed Belle.

"'Push'!" promptly answered Freda. "An old fisherman came along as Jack was arranging the painter, and he just said 'push'!"

"That would be a handy little name," commented Walter.

"Next some boys, out clamming, saw her," said Jack, "and they said 'peach.'"

"Either of which would have done nicely," declared Ed. "Peach would have been the very name—after the girls——"

"*Chelton* is dignified and appropriate," interposed Cora; "besides, if we should stray off to Holland they would know along the Dikes that we belonged in *Chelton*."

"Now don't forget that the wheel is a sea wheel and turns opposite to the direction you want to go," cautioned Jack.

"How is that?" inquired Lottie, who had joined the other in examining the boat.

She was shown with patience. The boys were plainly glad that one of the girls, at least, did not know all about running a motor boat.

"And oh, what is that?" gasped Marita. "That cunning little playhouse!"

"Playhouse!" repeated Cora. "That's our living room—our cabin. Those fixtures are to cook with, eat with, live with and do all our house-keeping with."

"Also die with," added Walter. "I think that electric toaster might be all right for fudge, but for real bread—Now say, Cora, can you really cook pork and beans on that?"

"These are the very latest, most improved and most expensive electric attachments on the market," answered Cora, with a show of dignity, "and when you boys take a meal here, if we ever invite you to, I think we can easily prove the advantage of electrical attachments over campfire iron pots."

The cooking apparatus was examined with interest. A motor boat cabin fitted up with such a "kitchenette" was indeed a novelty.

"You see," explained Cora, "we have two ways of getting power. We can take it from the storage battery, or from the little dynamo attached to the motor."

"Lovely!" exclaimed Lottie, to whom a "cur-

rent" meant little, but who wanted to seem interested.

"That is to provide for the various kinds of cooking," Jack said, jokingly. "Now eggs are weak, they cook by storage; but a Welsh rabbit is done by the dynamo."

"It means something else," Captain Cora remarked, "namely, if we have company for supper, and the storage current gives out, we will not have to make it a progressive meal, extending into the next day. The course can be continued from the extra current."

"For the love of Malachi!" exclaimed Walter. "What's this?"

"Our boiler," said Bess, who knew something about the boat's fitting up. "We have that for dishwater."

"Dishwater!" repeated Ed. "You've got this down to domestic science all right. That rubber hose runs off the hot water from the cylinder jacket, and——"

"Oh, never!" cried Jack. "They will be making tea with it."

"Isn't it salty?" innocently asked Marita.

"Likely," said Belle, for the girls had all taken an interest in the housework-made-easy-plan, and had arranged to use the boiling water as it came from the motor after cooling the cylinder. "But it won't hurt dishes."

"Now I call that neat," commented Ed, "and to think that mere girls should have thought of it."

Freda gave Cora a meaning glance. "Girls ought to think of the housework," she laughed with a wink at Belle. "Just look at the linen chest."

She opened a small box and exhibited a goodly supply of suitable linen. No table cloths; just small pieces, doilies and plenty of neat, pretty towels.

"Let's board here," suggested Walter. "Our food was really rude this morning."

"Do we go out for a sail?" asked Ed, attempting to turn on the gasoline.

"Oh, no indeed!" Cora answered quickly. "Not a box is unpacked in our place yet, and perhaps, if you boys are all to rights, you wouldn't mind giving us a hand."

"Oh, of course we're all to rights," replied Jack. "I had a bolt of mosquito netting for my blanket last night and Wallie's bathrobe for my pillow."

"And I made friends with a pretty, little, soft ground mole, Jack," put in Ed, "and if the rest of our boxes do not arrive and unpack themselves in time for your slumber this eve, that mole has agreed to cuddle up under your left ear. I believe you sleep on your left."

"Thanks," Jack said, "but I see no reason why

mere household truck should keep us from a cruise. I am aching to try the *Chelton*, Cora."

Cora and Freda were talking in whispers in the other end of the boat. It was no "mere household truck" surely that brought the serious expression to their faces.

"It isn't far," Freda was heard to say, "and he promised to wait for us this morning."

"And I do want to be with you," Cora answered. "But I won't let them take the boat out the first time without me. It cost too much to run the risk of damaging it by sky-larking."

"Now what are you two up to?" demanded Jack. "Just because Drayton Ward has not arrived, we are held up for his coming. I tell you, Sis, that chap may not put in an appearance at all, here. He knows—sweller places."

"Oh, don't you mind him, Cora," Ed interrupted. "Dray is sure to come. He had his canoe shipped two days ago, besides sending to the cove for his motor boat. I expect some tall times when he gets here. Our own innocent little *Lassie* won't know how to skip over the waves at all—she'll be that flustered when the swell, gold-railed, mahogany-bound, carpet-floored *Dixie* gets here."

"It would take more than a mere *Dixie* to knock out our *Lassie*," declared Walter, "but I should like to know why she is not on the scene yet. Didn't we plainly say Tuesday?"

"We did, plainly and emphatically. But a boat builder, letter or seller has a right to make his own day in delivering the goods. We'll be lucky if we get the barge at all without taking the sheriff up to that shipyard."

"Meanwhile we have the *Chelton*," said Ed, tugging at Cora's sleeve.

"And we must get back to the bungalow," she observed. "Freda and I have an important appointment for eleven, and if you all promise not to follow us or attempt to go out in the *Chelton*, perhaps we will have some interesting news for you this evening."

The boys strolled away, talking about the motor boat they had hired. Money, for some reason, was not plentiful that Summer with Jack and his chums, and they had to be content with a second-hand craft, that had been patched and re-patched until there was little of the original left. They were not even sure the *Lassie* would run, but they were anxious to try her.

CHAPTER IV

THE RED OAR

"THIS way, Cora. The sand is so heavy out there it is better to keep near the edge," said Freda, as the two girls tramped along in the deep sand of the seashore that banded Crystal Bay.

"But isn't it perfectly beautiful along here?" exclaimed Cora, in rapt delight. "I had no idea the little place could be so charming."

"Oh, yes," returned Freda, with a suspicion of a sigh. "Over there, just in that splendid green stretch is, or was, grandfather's place. It runs all along to the island, and on the other side there is a stream that has been used for a mill race."

"Over there!" Cora repeated. "Why, that looks like the very best part of the bay. And that house on the hill?"

"Grandfather's own home and—mother's," finished Freda.

"Is it rented now?"

"Yes, we have rented it for three years, and it has brought us quite a little income," said Freda.

"But you see that is cut off now. I am sure I do not know who collects the rents."

"What a shame!" cried Cora. "And all because there is some technical proof of ownership missing. I should think that when your family had undisputed possession for years it ought to be sufficient to establish your rights."

"Yes, we never dreamed we could lose it," Freda explained. "Mother and I have lived there in the Winter since father died, and we have rented it in Summer, as I said. Of course the Summer is the desirable time here. And we had some of the loveliest old furniture. But when we had to break up we sold most of it."

"Look out! There's a hole there," Cora warned just in time, for in the heavy sand little rivulets were creeping from some rollers tossed in by a passing boat. The bay was dotted with many craft, and the picture it presented gave Cora keen delight, for it forecasted a merry Summer for the motor girls.

"We only have a little farther to go," Freda said. "I hope old Denny has kept his word and stayed in. He is the queerest old fellow—you will be amused at him, I am sure. But he was always such a staunch friend of grandfather."

"I am anxious to meet him," rejoined Cora. "Somehow I feel we girls ought to get at the bottom of this. Wouldn't it be fine if we could?"

"More than fine, it would be glorious!" Freda replied. "If we lose it all now, I will have to look for work. Not that I mind that," she added, "but I intend to take a course in nursing. I have always longed to be a nurse."

"And that would be a splendid profession for you," Cora agreed. "I do hope you will not have to go to work in some office."

"Oh, there's Denny! Denny!" called Freda, leaving Cora without further ceremony, and hurrying ahead as fast as the soft sand would allow. "See, there he is! Just going out in his fishing boat."

Cora ran after her, and soon they overtook the old fisherman, who was deaf. Freda didn't mind getting her shoes wet in order to approach the water's edge.

"Good morning, Denny," she called, "come in here. We want to talk to you."

He took his pipe from his mouth, in order that his mind should not be distracted. Then he pushed his cap back, and dropped an oar.

"Freddie, is that you?" he asked. "Sure I thought you was comin' up to the shack, and I've bin waitin' for you."

"We are on our way up there now. You are not going out, are you?" pleaded Freda.

"No, Freddie," (he always called her Freddie),

"I'll come right in. I was only goin' acrost to get a few little things; but they can wait."

Cora now had a chance to see this quaint old fellow. He was Irish, with many fine humorous wrinkles about his eyes and mouth. He seemed to breathe through his pipe, so constantly did he inhale it, and just how he kept his sailor's blouse so clean, and his worn clothes so neat, was a trick he had learned in his younger days in the navy.

"Isn't this a fine day?" he commented, with a nod to Cora.

"Simply perfect," she answered, seeing there was no need for a formal introduction. "I have been telling Freda how surprised I was at the beauty of this place."

"Surprised, is it? Sure, there ain't another spot this side of Cape Cod with as many fine points to it. I wouldn't leave this little bay for a berth on any ocean liner."

"My friend, Cora Kimball, is from Chelton, Uncle Denny. Do you know where that is?" asked Freda.

"Chelton? Chelton? Sure, I do. I went through there once in a parade wagon. We were out with the G. A. R. and I guess the parade got lost, for I remember at Chelton we had to put up for the night in an old church they were using for a fire house. But we had a fine time," and he chuckled at the recollection. "And next day we

finished up without the need of a wagon. It was like camp days to scatter ourselves about the big ramshackle place."

"Oh, yes, that's out in the East End," Cora said. "We have quite an up-to-date fire house in Chelton Center."

"Well, that was good enough for me," he asserted. "But come along and I'll show you my shack. Freddie will be surprised at my new decorations."

Up the little board walk to a path through the woods the three tramped. Denny Shane was popular with young folks; even the mischievous boys who would occasionally untie his boat before a storm had no reason to fear his wrath, for such pranks were quickly forgotten.

"And the mother, Freddie?" he asked. "How's she gettin' on?"

"Well, she worries a good deal," the girl replied. "But I keep telling her it must come right in time."

"Sure it will. The rascals that would do wrong to a widder couldn't prosper. 'Taint lucky. But they're foxy. Did you hear anything new?"

"Yes, but not much that is substantial. My friend and I want to see you to find out all that you may know about it. Perhaps there is some clue we have been overlooking, that you could give us."

"Well, you're welcome to all I know. But here we are. No need to unlock my door," he said as he saw Cora smile at his unceremonious entrance to the shack. "Them that has nothin' has nothin' to fear."

A surprising little place, indeed, the girls were shown into. Neat and orderly, yet convenient and practical, was Denny Shane's home. There was a stove and a mantel, a table, two chairs and a long bench. Pieces of rag carpet indicated the most favored spots—those to be lived on.

"And now, Freddie," began Denny, drawing out two chairs, "what do you think of my house-keeping?"

"Why, you are just as comfortable and neat as possible," she replied. "But I notice one thing has not lost its place—your red oar."

"No—indeed!" he said almost solemnly. "That oar will stay with me while Denny Shane has eyes to see it. It has a story, Freddie, and I often promised to tell it to you. This is as good a time as another."

He put his pipe down, brought a big chair up to the window, opened a back door to allow the salt air to sweep in; then, while Cora looked with quickening interest at the old red oar, that hung over the fireplace, Denny shook his head reflectively and started with his story.

"That oar," he said, "seems like a link between

me and Leonard Lewis—your grandpa, Freddie. And, too, it is a reminder of the night when I nearly went over the other sea, and would have, but for Leonard Lewis and his strong red oar."

A light flashed into the old eyes. Plainly the recollections brought up by his story were sacred. He left his chair and went over to the mantel, climbed up on a box and touched the oar that had sagged a little from its position.

"The wind rocks this shanty so," he explained, "the oar thinks it's out on the waves again, I guess. I don't like to spoil it with nails or strings."

"It looks very artistic," Cora declared; "but how curious that an oar should be painted red."

"Yes, there was only one pair of them, that I know of. One went with the wreck, and this one Len Lewis held on to. Now I'll tell you about it."

Again he seated himself and this time started off briskly with the tale.

"It was a raw January night—in fact, it seemed as if it had been night all day for all the chance the sun had to get out. A howling wind whistled and fairly shrieked at everything that didn't fly fast enough to suit it. Len and me had been puttin' in a lot of time together at his house, just chinnin'—there wasn't much else to do but to keep warm. Well, along about five o'clock, we heard a rocket! The wind died away for a minute or so, and we dashed out to the beach to get the lay of that dis-

tress signal. Talk about big city fires!" he digressed. "A fire on land ain't what it is on sea. It always seems like as if death has a double power with the fire and the deep and nothing but the sky above to fan the flame.

"We soon saw the smoke. It was from a point just over the turn, where the clouds dip down and touch the waves. A little tail of smoke crawled up and hung black and dirty, not gettin' any bigger nor spreadin' much. When we sighted her, we went to work in the way men of the sea have of working together and never sayin' a word. Up the beach we chased, and dragged out the boat we called our 'Lifer.' It was a good, strong fishin' boat, and we kept her ready in the rough weather.

" 'Wait!' yelled Len to me, just as I was pushin' off. 'I've got a lucky pair of oars. They're bigger and heavier than ours, and I'll toss 'em in. We might need 'em.'

"Little I thought of the need we would have! And I always laughed at Len's idea of luck—and me an Irishman, too."

"Mother always said grandfather was queer about such things," Freda remarked. "I remember we had an old jug that he found on one of his birthdays. He would never allow that jug to be thrown out; he said it meant a jug full of good luck."

"And it, of course, was an empty jug," Cora

said, with a smile. "Perhaps that is, after all, the luckiest kind."

Denny chuckled over that remark, and added he had not much use for jugs of any kind.

"But I'm gettin' away from my yarn," he said, presently. "We took the big thick oars and pulled out against the wind. By this time the hail was comin' down in chunks that would cut the face off you. Sometimes there are a lot of stragglers around here, but when we need a man, of course, there is not one in sight. But we rowed away and somehow managed to get close to the wreck. It was a little steamer, not much bigger than a tug, and it was burning faster than the smoke told us.

"'You throw the rope and I'll stick to the oars!' shouted Len, his voice sounding like a wheeze in the wind. There were three men on the steamer and they were just about tuckered out. They were clingin' to the rail, their hands blisterin' from the flames that were sweepin' up close to them even as they touched the water's edge.

"It's an awful thing to see sufferin' like that," he put in. "I won't ever forget how those fellows tumbled into our boat. They just rolled in like dead men. But my rope got caught in the rudder of the steamer, and I tugged and tugged, but it looked as if we would have to let her burn off before we could free ourselves. Just when I decided to make a big haul at it I came near my end.

I stood up, gave the rope a yank, and with that—rip! She let go! And I went with it over into the water!”

“Goodness!” Cora exclaimed. “It was bad enough to have to rescue the other men, but for you to go into that roaring ocean!”

“It was bad, Miss,” agreed the narrator. “And the feel of that water as I struck it! It was like a bath of sword-points. Well, that’s where the oar comes in! Bless the bit of wood it was cut from, it sure was a good, strong stick.

“When I flopped into the water, like a fish dumped out of a net, your grandpop, Freddie, took nary a chance at reachin’ me with the rope. He dropped the regular oars and took one of the pair he called lucky.

“‘Here,’ he yelled, ‘grab to that!’

“I can see the red flash now as it nearly hit me on the head, but though I did make a stab at it the water was that cold and the ice so thick on me hands that I couldn’t hold on.

“It’s pretty bad to be floppin’ around like that, I can tell you. But Len kept shoutin’ and when one of the other fellows got enough breath to stand up with, he took a hand at the rescuin’.

“It was him who dropped the mate to that oar overboard. Mad! I could hear Len yell through the thick of it all. But he held the last red oar.

“With the effort to keep up me blood heated

some, and the next time I saw the flash of red I grabbed it good an' proper. It took three of them to haul me up, but I clung to the red oar and that's how I'm here this minute. Likewise, it's why the oar is here with me."

There was a long pause. The girls had been thrilled with the simple recital, so void of anything like conceit in the part that Denny himself had played in the work of rescue.

CHAPTER V

TWO MEN

"AND the red oar won out," Cora remarked, looking at the old relic with something akin to reverence. "Perhaps, after all, there is something in luck."

"Looked like it," agreed Denny. "And after we got back Len couldn't pay any attention to the half-frozen men, or to me, that had been pretty well chilled—all he could do was talk about the luck of that oar."

"I don't blame him," Freda put in. "Your rope had nearly burned, your light oar broke, one of the heavy pair went overboard and this one did most of the work getting back, I suppose."

"Right," said Denny, "for while we had another pair to work with, they were slim, and weak, but that fellow, it sure was tough then; but lately when I take it down it seems to have shrunk, for it's gettin' lighter, somehow."

"And how did you come to get it?" asked Cora.

"That's the end of my story," said Denny.

"When Len was taken very sick, of course I used to stay with me friend as much as I could."

Freda unconsciously pushed her chair nearer the old man. Surely to hear of the last days of her good grandfather's life was a matter too important to pass over lightly.

"Your father was livin' then, Freddie," Denny went on, "and a fine healthy young man, too."

"Father died so suddenly," said Freda, "mother hardly ever speaks of his death. She always seems overcome after talking of it."

"That was a sad thing," Denny digressed. "To go off in the morning, a-whistlin' and happy, and to be brought home without a word in him. Freddie, dear, I oughtn't to talk of it."

Freda brushed aside a tear. Her father's death had been caused by apoplexy, when she was but a mite of a child.

"But the queer part of it was that your grandfather seemed to think I would outlive his son, and John such a strappin'-lookin' fellow," resumed Denny. "Len called me to him, and him sick and miserable, and he says: 'Denny, John's not as strong as he looks, and I want you to do all you can to help Louisa,' (your mother of course, Freddie), 'for she has the child to raise,' he said. Well, he wouldn't let me interrupt him when I tried to speak of John. He would have it that I should keep an eye to things. Your grandfather

Lewis left me no papers, however—I supposed John had them—but he left me the old red oar. He had fairly been playin' with it for years, always polishin' it or shapin' it off here or there. I often look at the marks of his knife on it, and wonder why he seemed fond of it."

"I am sure," said Freda, earnestly, "you have kept your promise, Uncle Denny. Mother often speaks of how good you were when I was small. Father never had any papers about grandfather's land; all he had related to family keepsakes. The strange part of it all is to me that a man of grandfather's intelligence should be so remiss about his property claims."

"But, Freddie, you don't understand. There seemed no need for deeds and mortgage papers then about here. Everybody knew everyone else, and things seemed to be solid forever. But now them plagued land fellows—well, they've got a good cheek, is all I can say." And he emptied an unsmoked pipe of tobacco in his indignation.

"But we are going to get after them," Cora declared. "We want to go slowly, and, if possible, find out what their intentions are. Find what sort of company they claim to have, in the first place, and if they are an honorable set of men they ought to make open claims, instead of sneaking around, and trying to find out things that

might cause a flaw in the title. I am suspicious, for one," she finished significantly.

"Well, good luck to your spunk," said Denny, "and I never knew the like of it to fail. But say, tell me about the boat. What did the lads think of the fixin's?"

"Oh, it was the greatest fun," Freda replied. "They could not imagine how we ever thought of using the cylinder water for a dishwater supply. I never gave it away that you suggested it to Cora's mechanic."

"And I want to thank you, Mr. Shane——"

"Mr. Shane!" Denny interrupted. "Say, if you call me that I'll think I'm reading me own death notice in the *Beacon*."

Cora laughed at this, and agreed he should be "Uncle Denny" to her as well as to the others of the neighborhood.

"But it was splendid of you to have the boat all ready for us when we came. I did not suppose Freda had a chance to get down to it before we loomed up."

"You don't know the risin' hour for us folks at the Bay," returned Denny, with a sly wink. "Freddie couldn't stay abed when the sun is beckonin' on the waves; could you, Freddie?"

"Oh, the early Summer mornings are beautiful," replied Freda, "and I am sorry I had to lose so many of them. Who's that? The girls, look-

ing for us! There's Bess puffing, and Belle—fluffing. I do think they are the most attractive pair.”

Cora smiled, for her own devotion to the Robinson twins was only paralleled by the twins' devotion to Cora.

“Cora! Freda!” called youthful voices from the path. “Where are you?”

“Come in—do!” answered Denny, who always had a spare chair for visitors.

“Oh, we can't,” replied Belle. “Cora, the boys are threatening to take out the *Chelton*. And oh! I'm completely out of breath. It's dreadful to try to hurry through the sand.”

“Indeed they shall not take the *Chelton* out without my permission,” Cora declared. “When we make our initial trip I intend to command it. For one thing, Uncle Denny is to come along; for another—well, that's to be a little surprise. This afternoon at two exactly—will you come, Uncle Denny?”

“I will that,” the old sailor replied. “I think it would be a good thing to have a little weight, like my old head, in her when she starts out. Them laddies are always up to pranks.”

“Oh, we are just crazy to get out on the water,” Bess put in, “and what do you think? That vain little Lottie went all the way to town to get the exact nautical cap. I wonder if she thinks folks

in motor boats run slowly enough to see little white caps on little light girls?"

"When we get going I think all that will be seen will be splash, and all that will be heard will be chug," Cora remarked. "But come on. Let's hurry along. I promised Rita to help her with something."

"What?" asked Bess, curiously.

"Now, Bessie, that would be telling," replied Cora, stopping just long enough to empty the sand from her tennis shoe. Denny was trudging along after them—he could not resist an excuse to go down to the shore.

"Well, I'll say good-bye," said Freda. "I have to run back to mother. She will think I am lost."

"But you are coming this afternoon?" Cora insisted.

"Oh, I really can't, Cora, thank you," answered the other. "I have something so important to look after."

"What are you girls up to?" demanded Belle. "You have been acting mysteriously ever since you met on the train. Freda, it is really unpardonable not to take the initial trip with us, but if you really cannot——"

"I really cannot," returned Freda, decisively, and somehow the girls realized that Freda's business was urgent.

"Now, I'll show you a short cut," said Denny.

"Take that path there—don't be afraid of the sign that the owner put up—he has no right to the beach front; then when you get to the Lonely Willow—do you know where that is?"

Not one of them knew, but they were anxious to find out.

"You can't miss the Lonely Willow, for it stands all alone and looks as forlorn as the mast of a sunken steamer," said Denny. "It's in the deep hollow by the watercress patch. Turn around that tree to your left and you'll see another path. But wait a minute," he broke off, "maybe it's a bit lonely."

"Oh, there are enough of us to shout if we see bears," Cora laughed. "We have to hurry, and we will be glad to explore."

"Well, good-bye then, and good luck. I'll be at the dock ahead of you."

"Isn't he the quaintest old man?" asked Belle as the little party hurried along. Then she added: "You and Freda made quite a visit. We began to think you were kidnapped."

"We did make a stay," agreed Cora, "but Denny is a very old friend of Freda's family, and, to tell you the truth, we could hardly break away when he started in to tell sea-yarns. Ouch! The mud is deep. I guess we must be near the Lonely Willow."

"There it is!" exclaimed Belle, who was some-

what in advance of the others. "Indeed, it does stand all alone."

"Isn't it scary here!" whispered Bess. "See those two men under the Willow."

All eyes were turned to the big tree. Two men were seated on a branch that made a comfortable seat. As the girls approached one of the men wrapped some papers up and thrust them into his pocket. But the movement was not lost on the girls.

No word was spoken for a few moments. Belle dropped back a little as if to allow the others to face the strangers first. Of course Cora, always being the leader, boldly made her way along.

They had to pass almost under the tree to reach the path, but there was no halting once the girls started out.

Finally they had passed in perfect safety, but as they were almost out of earshot one of the men said:

"I thought she'd be with him—that old Denny!"

The rest of the remark was lost, but this fragment served to put Cora on her guard.

CHAPTER VI

THE "CHELTON"

"Oh, isn't it exciting?" cried Marita, who had managed to have Jack help her over the dunes on the way to the dock.

"You're right!" replied Jack, surveying her "nautical" outfit. "Couldn't beat it."

"Silly! I mean going for the cruise."

"Oh, I thought you meant that rig you're wearing. It is most becoming, but I hope it won't get wet."

"Oh, the water won't hurt it. I got it on that account. I think the girls' maroon sweaters look dandy—they can be seen for such a distance."

"Yes, I suppose togs have something to do with a good time, although I must say Cora doesn't seem to give much time to hers. Look at Marita in white. She looks like a French doll."

"Oh, she is the cutest thing!" replied Lottie, in her gushing way. "But Cora is simply stunning! Just see how she stands out in the crowd."

Lottie and Jack strolled through the moss-padded path that led to the white sands of Tangle

Turn, talking in this vein as they went. It was indeed a merry crowd, and well worth noticing, as was evinced by the number of curious spectators already assembled on the dock to which the *Chelton* was tied.

"Who's the man?" asked Jack, espying a striking figure in the throng.

"Oh, that's Uncle Denny; don't you know him? He is the dearest——"

"Now, Lottie, I can see his bald head under his cap at this distance without marine glasses, and it's a rule of the club that 'dears' have special advantages in the matter of healthy heads of hair. But, of course, if you wish to call him 'dear'——"

"Jack, you are the greatest tease," she pouted.

Bess, Belle and Cora had already reached the motor boat. Denny was proudly "looking her over," pipe in mouth and hands in pockets. The girls were bustling about, all enthusiasm, while the boys, assuming an air of importance, found many points to investigate.

"Now take seats," called Cora, "we are ready to push off. Lottie, don't lean overboard."

"Oh, I am watching the cutest little fish. See, Bess," she exclaimed.

Ed was on the dock with the rope loose from the cleat. Cora was at the steering wheel, while Denny insisted on turning the fly wheel, as that seemed about the most difficult thing to do. The

gasoline was turned on, Jack attending to that, and as Denny gave the fly wheel a vigorous turn, Ed pushed off and jumped into the boat. The "push" sent the *Chelton* out in the water, but the motor failed to do its duty. Again Denny tried, but still no response. As this is not unusual with any motor, whether new or old, all hands waited patiently.

"Oh, there's the *Dixie!*" called Lottie, jumping up and waving to an approaching boat.

At that instant the *Chelton* started with a jerk, and there was a chorus of screams.

"Lottie's overboard!" cried the girls.

"Overboard!" repeated the boys.

"Quick!" begged Cora. "She may sink!"

To bring the boat to a sudden stop was not an easy matter, and there were some moments of suspense before the *Chelton* passed safely to the other side of the spot where Lottie was struggling.

The water was not so deep but that she was able to scramble to her feet, but the wash of the boat forced her to work violently to keep her head above water.

"The rope!" called Cora, who had dashed from her position at the steering wheel to the side of the boat where the mooring rope had been dropped. In the excitement, of course, all crowded to one side of the small craft, which caused it to careen alarmingly.

"There! There!" shouted Ed. "Lottie, grab the rope!"

"Oh, I can't," came the rather weak and shaky reply. "I can't reach it."

By this time the *Dixie*, the innocent cause of the accident, was alongside. Drayton Ward, the wealthy young fellow who could boast of a motor boat that would have aroused comment even at Newport, leaned over the side and grasped the arm of the girl in the water. The rest was a simple matter, for soon Lottie was assisted over the rail of the *Dixie*, and was in the finest boat on Crystal Bay.

"What do you think of that?" gasped Bess into Cora's ear.

"Clever!" replied Cora, simply.

"But the togs?" queried Jack, to whom the accident had seemed something of a joke.

"What a pity," returned Belle, "and she did look so sweet!"

All this time the drenched girl was being most carefully looked after by the gallant captain of the *Dixie*. He was seeing to it that she did not suffer from a chill, for a big coat had been wrapped around her and her pretty white cap that had merrily floated off was now replaced by one marked "Dixie." Altogether, for a mere Summer dip, Lottie was having a magnificent time, as Ed took pains to observe.

"Oh, I can't go with you now!" called Lottie.
"Mr. Ward has kindly offered to take me home."

There was a pause after that remark. If Lottie went back to the bungalow it seemed only reasonable that someone should go with her. But who? Everyone wanted to take the trip on the *Chelton*.

"Let us take you up to the point," called Cora, "and we can wait for you to change and come back. Our trip would be spoiled with one of the party missing."

"Let's shift," suggested Drayton, with a gracious smile at Cora. "Mine is probably the faster boat. You get in here with us, Miss Cora, and we will run up and down the bay while your friends are working off the oil smoke. That's a neat little boat you have, a perfect little model," he finished, coming as close as possible to the *Chelton*.

"Your's is all right, too, Dray," replied Jack, "but it looks too good to be true. Doesn't shoot up on land for a change, does it? I have heard of *Dixies* doing that stunt."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Lottie. "I am freezing to death. I guess I'll go change my dress."

"Good idea," agreed Cora, who was ready to leave her boat and go back to the bungalow with Lottie. "Come on," and she jumped to the dock to which her boat had drifted. "I'll run along with you."

"Nice way to treat a fellow," complained Drayton. "Well, fellows, I'll race you while we are waiting for the ladies to return. What do you say, Jack?"

"I'm willing, as long as Cora has finally condescended to let me touch the wheel. Everybody sit down this time."

Without a word all hands, keen for a race as soon as one was suggested, took seats, and the two boats veered out into the bay and "lined up" for the start. Denny was the proudest engineer imaginable, and constantly looked over the fine mechanism.

"Ready!" shouted Ed, and at the word both throttles were thrown wide open and the boats shot up the bay, emitting clouds of smoke from their newly oiled works, and "chugging" so rapidly that the sounds were drowned in a roar. It was a pretty sight, for in the girls' boat a line of colored sweaters and waving caps lent life to the gray of the waters, while Drayton, in his glistening, highly-polished *Dixie*, only needed the glint that the sun lent to complete the picture afforded by his fine craft.

"Oh, isn't this glorious!" exclaimed Marita. "I thought I should be frightened, but this is—lovely."

"Frightened!" repeated Belle. "I used to be so afraid of the water I couldn't see anything but

the bottom every time I came out; but now I just love it."

"Hey there, Dray!" shouted Ed. "You're out of the course. Get in from shore!"

"He's keeping his eye on those girls on the beach," laughed Walter. "Those are the lassies who have the white canoe." So saying he waved his own cap and a flutter of handkerchiefs from the beach came back in recognition.

"Turn at the island," ordered Denny.

Here a white flag fluttered, the stake left from some recent sailing races. Gracefully the *Chelton* rounded the stake first. Drayton had lost time in running too close to shore. Only a minute later the *Dixie* swayed after the *Chelton*, then the final stretch was taken up in earnest. Spectators on the bank might wave now, but the motorists had no eyes for them. A slight miss in the *Chelton's* explosion brought Denny and Ed to their feet—there should be no break in the rhythm of that chug.

"She's all right," Ed called to the old sailor, "only too much oil."

Denny shook his head lest a word might interfere with the boat's motion. Dray stood up and did something that caused the bow of his boat to shoot up, while the stern seemed to bury itself in the waves.

"His is a racer," Walter told Bess, who was as

intent as any of the watchers on the result of the trial of speed.

"Maybe ours will turn out to be a winner," Bess responded. "We keep pretty close."

Jack never took his hand off the steering wheel, Denny was watching the engine, and the others were peering down the straight course ahead.

"Oh, I'm getting all wet," exclaimed Marita, for the spray was dashing in on all sides.

"Get down in the bottom," advised Walter, "we can't slacken up now. Or go in the cabin if you like and close the ports."

This was a signal for all three girls to slip down to the floor of the boat and while they lost the good view afforded from the seats, they evidently enjoyed the change, and craned their necks to see over the sides.

"Of course Dray will win," complained Belle. "We couldn't expect to beat the *Dixie*."

"We might," encouraged Bess. "Cora said this boat had remarkable speed for its size."

"Gee, whiz!" shouted Walter, "look at that spray deluge Dray!"

"And she's missing," added Ed, for the sounds from the *Dixie* were distinctly out of time.

Suddenly Dray's boat slowed down, and the *Chelton* shot so far ahead that it was plain something had happened to the *Dixie*.

Jack stood up and looked back. "Something

is wrong," he said. "We had better not get too far ahead. Dray is fussing with the carbureter."

The race was over. The girls stood up from their hiding place and Jack turned the boat about. By this time Dray had turned off the gasoline and the *Dixie* merely heaved up and down on the swells.

"What's the matter, Dray?" called Walter. "Something given way?"

"I don't know," answered Dray, "she simply won't 'mote.'"

"Let me take a look at her," suggested Denny, ever eager for a new adventure.

"Oh, there are Cora and Lottie!" exclaimed Belle. "Can't we go in for them, and look after Dray's boat afterward?"

"That would be a nice way to treat a ship in distress," said Denny, "but excuse me," and he showed regret at his remark. "I shouldn't be thinkin' of a lad when the young girls are needin' help."

"Oh, the girls are all right," Jack assured the old seaman; "but say, Dray," he called, "what's the matter, anyhow?"

"Just give me a line and tow me in, then we will hold a post mortem," replied Dray, good humoredly. "I don't fancy taking her apart out here."

"Good!" exclaimed Marita, "then we can go for Cora and Lottie."

Promptly the brand new rope of the *Chelton* was tossed to the disabled boat and fastened, then the two boats started for shore.

Cora and Lottie were waiting. The latter had shed her wet "garments of vanity," as Belle described them, for a simple brown linen frock.

"What happened?" called Cora, as the boats neared shore.

"Mis-happened," answered Dray. "It was just fate. We couldn't expect to beat the motor girls."

"Nice of you," acknowledged Cora, "but I am sorry if there is anything wrong with your beautiful boat."

"It's the boat and not the boy," remarked Ed. "Well, we'll do as much for you some day, Cora. Wait until we get our little *Lassie* out. She, being a mere girl, may have a show."

"What's the matter, Lottie?" asked Bess, as they landed and the girls noted that Lottie was remarkably quiet, and even a trifle pale.

"Not a thing," Cora hurriedly answered, while she crushed her fingers on Lottie's arm. "We were detained at the bungalow, that's all. We'll tell you all about it later on."

The girls gathered around Cora and Lottie at this remark. But Cora, by some mysterious signal system, had warned Lottie not to say anything,

and she soon joined the boys, who had already boarded the *Dixie* to overhaul her.

They looked at the engine, at the spark plugs, at the cylinder, but Cora, who happened to have more room at the point where the carbureter was situated, suddenly exclaimed:

"I've got it! Water in the carbureter!"

"Right-o!" confirmed Dray, in another moment. "The spray mixed with the gas—dashed over into the air in-take valve. Moral, go slow, for water sometimes is fatal, even in a good cause!"

"Shame to spoil the race," said Ed; "we were just warming up."

"It's all right," commented Denny, "and a good lesson. I never knew myself that too much speed would do the like of that. Well, I must be off doin' some chores. I've been a-galavantin' most of the day, and the fishes of Crystal Bay are not educated to come up to me door yet. Thank you for the sport. It was fine," he concluded, genially.

"Indeed you must come along again," Cora urged. "This was only a baby-trial. We will want to be going out on the deep soon; then you must come along."

"Thank you, very kindly," Denny called, as he started off. "The deep is a bad place for young 'uns, I can tell you. Better stick around shore."

"Tell us what is the matter, Lottie," demanded Bess, for Lottie had not yet recovered her self-possession.

"Oh, I guess I had a chill," she evaded, glancing at Cora.

"And the mere sight of a couple of strange men startled her," Cora added. "I have warned her there may be lots of strange men around Crystal Bay."

"But not the same strange men every time," Lottie put in. This gave a clue to her fright. The men who had secluded themselves under the Lonely Willow that morning had appeared again, this time in the vicinity of the girls' bungalow, now known as the "Motely Mote."

CHAPTER VII

IN THE MOTELY MOTE

"Do you young ladies realize that we have the cares of housekeeping on our shoulders?" asked Cora, from a mass of boxes and bags, not to mention trunks, in the alleged living room of the Mote.

"Oh, let us forget it—do," begged Bess. "I always hate the summertime when it brings dishes and things."

"It's good for you," affirmed Marita. Bess did know that hard work is considered "good" for stout persons.

"Maybe, but it is not pleasant," Bess answered, flinging herself upon the improvised couch, a matter of hammocks and blankets, still bearing baggage checks and tie-ropes.

"But our housekeeper has given notice," announced Cora. "And I don't wonder. Not one has been on time for a single meal since we arrived. But I must say, I wish she had stayed until the stuff was all unpacked. It's dreadful on the hands," and she looked at hers ruefully.

"Why not ask the boys to help?" asked Lottie, who was doing her best to press her damp clothes by stretching the most important of them over Belle's trunk, and holding them there with two suitcases. "If I had not gotten these things wet I should have been glad to unpack, but if I leave them this way over night I shall never be able to wear them again."

"If you knew the boys as well as we do," Bess put in, "you would know what their help means. They would insist upon trying on every article of clothing they unpacked; wouldn't they Cora?"

"Something like that, Bess, if they did unpack at all. But, seriously, if you will give me a little help to drag these empty trunks to the porch, I will tell you of a plan I have evolved. Of course we cannot remain this way without a chaperone."

"Isn't it perfectly silly?" complained Belle. "As if we were not all capable of taking care of ourselves."

"Oh, I don't know about that," objected Cora. "I have noticed that in case of emergency, when some strange man happens to poke his nose in at the window, we are all rather glad to acknowledge we are mere babes."

"And also when we meet them under willow trees," Marita reminded the boastful ones. "I

am sure I agree with Cora that we need a chap-erone, and perhaps a policeman or two."

The girls paused in dragging the baggage toward the front door.

"Just the same," Marita went on, "Lottie was frightened to-day and she only heard a strange man say, 'They call them the motor girls.' As if that was anything terrifying."

"But it was the way they said it," Lottie protested. "They just peered at us—and——"

"Now, Lottie," said Cora, "you have an idea that everyone who looks at us 'peers' at us. For my part I was rather flattered by their attention. You see the fame of the motor girls is spreading. But let me now make my proposition," and she settled down on the rug that was intended to cover the floor—some time.

"Let her 'prop'l" cried Belle.

"Well, you know our little friend, Freda, has lost some property; that is, her mother and herself have lost a certain claim to it. This little colony around here is fairly bristling with the prosperity implanted in it by such thrifty men as was Freda's grandfather, but in spite of that, strangers come in, make a big fuss about riparian rights, and government laws, and property claims and, in so doing, pretend to discover a flaw in a title that for years has been considered perfectly clear." She paused, for Bess had opened her mouth twice,

and this time Cora wanted to hear what she had to say.

"We heard some women talking about that to-day," said Bess, "and they said it was a shame to take a homestead from Mrs. Lewis. They were not whispering their opinions, either."

"So it is a shame," Cora said, "and if we can, in any way, help to get the truth established, we will surely have a good reason to remember this holiday."

"How?" queried Marita. "We don't understand anything about land, and deeds, and lawyers."

At this everyone but Marita laughed. She was not acquainted with the daring deeds of the motor girls, as that was what they had undertaken and accomplished in the past.

"You see, Marita dear," Cora explained, "because we seem such harmless babies we are able to get information that others, considered more dangerous, might not have access to. Now, let me continue. There are men around here, members of some sort of a land company, who are trying to get hold of certain papers. We don't know whether they exist or not, but in our own quiet, girlish way——"

Here she was interrupted with a burst of mocking laughter. "Your quiet girlish way," repeated Belle. "Why, Cora, I do believe if you thought

you could get the better of that land company you would take the *Chelton*, and go—pirating! Wouldn't it be great to go out on a dark night, steam up the bay, watch for other boats, listen to the smugglers——”

“Oh, Belle,” put in Lottie, “that's not the way in books. We would have to go out and get kidnapped, and then, when in the cave, we would hear the plot of the men who were going to steal the old homestead.”

“Hurrah!” cried her hearers.

“Lottie for captain of the kidnapped,” suggested Cora. “Now, Lottie, when it gets good and dark you are to go out under the biggest tree on the place and await your captors.”

“Hello there! Anybody home?”

“The boys!” gasped Belle. “Now what about having wasted our time? Come in!”

“Nice of you to ask us,” groaned Jack. “Say, we are dead and buried, and the will is now being read. Somebody broke into our larder and stole the grub. Have you any to put out at interest?”

“Stole your eatables!” exclaimed Marita.

“Well, you could scarcely call it that,” replied Jack, espying an undamaged orange on the window sill, and making a lunge for it. “We did intend to eat the stuff, but it was just plain grub—not eatables.”

"Jack, haven't you boys had your supper?" asked Cora.

"We are on a diet," explained Jack. "Wallie had the crackers, Ed nabbed the dried beef—he's the biggest and needs the most, you know—and I got the pickles. Then we followed directions, and each drank three sips of pure spring water. But the trouble arose when Dray came in. He said he was to have milk—doctor's orders. We didn't have any but 'pretense' milk, so Dray is now out looking for a cow."

Just then the sound of approaching footsteps was heard.

"They come!" announced Jack. "I was merely the herald. Have you made out the menu, Cora dear?"

"Do you mean to say we have to feed—all you boys?" demanded Bess.

"Feed us? No, we can eat with spoons. Just lead us to the eats. Really, it is serious with Dray. He has already gone dead white. Come in, fellows. We are expecting you. The girls are just getting out the best linen!"

Dray, Walter and Ed entered, and like Jack, showed signs of starvation. They literally fell into the most convenient spot available as they reached the room.

"Good evening, ladies," panted Dray. "We are delighted to accept your kind invitation to

dine with you. Pray pardon the togs. I feel like a regular 'toff,' don't you know, but my studs are for the moment lost. And what is a frock without the studs!"

"Well, if this isn't the very utmost," said Cora, laughing at the boys' predicament. "Do you mean to say that you are really hungry?"

"Shall we demonstrate?" asked Ed. "Do you allow us? Belle, get out the chronometer and a hunk of something. If you don't soon you will have a case of homicide on your hands."

Finally believing that the boys were hungry, the girls proceeded to empty the ice box on the back porch. They did not find any too much food there, for the sudden departure of their housekeeper that afternoon had left the girls themselves almost stranded. But, being girls, they managed the living end a little better than the boys did.

The boys, it seemed, had laid in a stock of canned stuff, in the usual hit-and-miss way, but some other campers found the "cave" where the food had been hidden. It was out of the question either to take or get ice, so the next best thing considered was the digging of a big hole in a very damp place. Into this the boys had sunk a nice, clean, galvanized tub, and in it the victuals had been placed. On top was a cover, made of boards and oil cloth, and over this was placed the limb from a tree, this last to detract attention.

"Now, wouldn't you think," said Jack, as he fortified himself with a sandwich, "that any decent chap would know that we belonged to the union? We are going to form a housewives' league at dawn to-morrow, and then we will find the culprits. They will be offering us our own grub at exorbitant rates."

"Bright little Jackie," commented Bess, who was devouring cheese and macaroons. "When you find the culprits you will have a perfectly good movie act in your camp. It will be entitled 'The Fate of the Kid Grubber.'"

While the boys were thus engaged in the delightful task of keeping off starvation, the girls were anxious to hear what was the proposition Cora had offered to lay before them.

"That's just the way," grumbled Belle; "we never can get at the interesting things!"

"I am going to tell the boys this minute," threatened Marita. "We notice, Belle, that you brought out that lemon pie that was hidden. Looks as if you found the boys rather interesting."

"Now you know exactly what I mean," insisted Belle. "Cora said we had to have a chaperone and we all agreed. Instead, we have a crowd of noisy boys."

"When you boys have finished," Cora remarked, "we would like to clear up the debris."

Also, we have a sad announcement to make. We have lost our housekeeper!"

"Good!" almost shouted Ed. "I apply at once. I can give every qualification, even to a civil service examination. Cora, I never tasted such food before——"

"Mutiny!" yelled Jack, making a spring at Ed, which ended in such a mixup that the girls fled to the kitchen.

"We really cannot stay alone here to-night," Cora said.

But the boys had come to their feet again, and evidently to terms. Jack was hugging Walter and Dray was smoothing Ed's black hair.

"Will the boys go and leave us?" asked the timid Marita.

"Of course they will, and that right now," declared Cora. "We have no time to spare to get someone else to stay with us, however. Bess, do you want to come with me? I am going out for our new companion."

CHAPTER VIII

FRIGHTS OR FANCIES

"OH, do hurry," pleaded Cora. "I had no idea it was so late. And it is awfully dark."

"A nice way to scare me when you have got me out," objected Bess. "Cora Kimball, I have a great mind to run back. I never saw lights look so attractive as they do just now in the Mote."

"Run back if you like," returned Cora, "but I will run on. It was unfortunate that the boys came in just as they did. I really have a good reason for not wanting to stay alone to-night."

"You have?" asked Bess. "I knew you and Lottie had had some adventure."

"Oh, don't be silly, Bess," and Cora laughed lightly. "Everything is perfectly safe and sane at the bay, but what I want is to get over to the little cottage where Freda and her mother are living before they retire. It is Mrs. Lewis I hope to get as our housekeeper."

"Mrs. Lewis!" exclaimed Bess in surprise.

"Yes, but we won't call her housekeeper. I

haven't thought it all out yet; in fact, I am not sure they will come, but I hope so."

"Oh, so do I; that would be fine," and Bess almost forgot how black the night was. "I met Mrs. Lewis the day we came, and I could not help thinking what a fine, wholesome mother Freda had."

"Yes, I have been talking to her and I think she is just that—fine and wholesome. And goodness knows," added Cora fervently, "we need some weight at the Mote. But they may not consent. I happened to overhear a remark this afternoon that set me to thinking. I am afraid poor Freda and her mother are in for further trouble."

They hurried along, making their way with difficulty in the deep sand that covered road and path alike. Once or twice they paused, startled at the sound of men's voices, then hurried the more to make up for lost time.

"Why didn't we have one of the boys come with us?" asked Bess.

"Because I am not ready yet to have the boys know all our plans, and to trust one of them—Bess Robinson, you know our boys. What one knows the rest can guess."

"That's so," mused Bess. "Is that the cottage?"

"Yes, right over there," and Cora indicated a

light through the trees. "I am glad they are still up!"

It was only a few steps further, and this space was rapidly covered. As the two girls reached the porch, and before they had a chance to touch the knocker, the door was opened by Freda.

"Who is it?" she asked in a frightened voice.

"Only Cora and Bess," Cora replied, noting the fear in Freda's tone. "Are we too late to come in?"

"No, indeed," Freda replied, reassured. "I was afraid it might be unwelcome visitors, but you are heartily welcome."

The living room of the cottage was typical of the seashore—a long apartment, with field-stone fireplace and fumed fir trim. The stairway led up from the room and gave it an air of even greater spaciousness. Altogether it was most attractive. Mrs. Lewis, a slim, fine-featured woman, rose from her rocker as the girls entered.

"It is late to call," began Cora, "but our business is really urgent. We have been left all alone suddenly—our housekeeper says she received a hurried call to go back to her family in the city. I don't question the call, I know how often and faithfully they follow maids who find a country place lonely; but the fact is we girls do not fancy staying alone to-night."

"Why, of course not," replied Mrs. Lewis,

briskly. "You must have some older person with you."

It was plain, now that the girls had become accustomed to the lights, that Freda and her mother had both been crying. Their eyes were red and their cheeks swollen. Freda saw that the girls observed this.

"Yes, we have been weeping," she said, with an attempt at a smile. "It seems as though we have new troubles daily."

"I am so sorry," Cora returned. "I wish we could help you."

"I am sure you have done so," replied Mrs. Lewis. "Freda has great hopes that you girls will do for us what perhaps lawyers might not be able to do." She hesitated and Freda went on:

"Those horrid men from the land company were here again this afternoon. They say we have no right even to this little cottage."

"No right here!" exclaimed Cora. "I believe they are just trying to get you to leave the place so that they can go on with their plans without being watched."

"I never thought of that," replied Mrs. Lewis, as though the idea was novel to her. "Then, indeed, they will have more trouble than brow-beating to get us to leave Crystal Bay."

"I must hurry with my errand," said Cora. "I came to see if it would be possible for you and

Freda to lock up and come over with us to-night. I am afraid those land sharks have our little place marked, too, for they have been loitering around all day. I don't want to tell the boys. They are hasty and so apt to resent any intrusion that would worry us."

"Why should the men bother you?" asked Mrs. Lewis.

"I suppose because they know that Freda is a friend of ours," replied Cora. "But don't worry about them bothering us, all we want is to be able to meet them fairly. Of course if they knew we were alone at night they might be mean enough to frighten us, and some of the girls are rather timid."

"Indeed, we will lock up at once," declared Mrs. Lewis, "and go right over with you. We have not many treasures now to be afraid of losing."

"Oh, that is splendid!" Cora cried. Freda immediately went about fastening the windows and seeing to the general locking up, while Mrs. Lewis hurried up stairs to pack a small bag. It seemed as though they were ready almost instantly, much to the relief of Bess, who kept wondering if the boys would remain at the bungalow with the girls until her own and Cora's return.

"Now we are off," said Mrs. Lewis, looking back at her home with a wistful sigh. She seemed

to have a premonition that leaving it meant more than appeared at the moment.

Freda walked with Bess while Mrs. Lewis and Cora kept close behind them. They had not more than reached the turn that led to the direct path when shouts and laughter were heard.

"There are the girls," Bess exclaimed. "They are looking for us."

The surmise was correct, for directly the answer came back to the familiar camp call.

"Here we are!" cried Cora. "On the pine path."

"Oh!" gasped Belle. "We have had the greatest fright! Where have you been?"

"Making a call," replied Cora, calmly. "What was your fright?"

"Come along and I'll tell you," Belle replied. Then she saw Freda and Mrs. Lewis.

"We have brought protectors," Cora said. "Mrs. Lewis and Freda are going to spend the night with us."

"Oh, splendid!" exclaimed Marita. "I was so afraid we would have to stay alone."

"Where are the boys?" Cora asked.

"Someone from the beach came up and said Dray's boat was loose, and of course, they had to all go at once to tie it up."

"Better than to let it drift," Cora said, "but I am sorry if you were timid."

"Oh, we were not," declared Belle, stoutly. "Only we distinctly heard someone on the back porch."

"At our ice box!" gasped Cora.

"Oh, we never thought of that!" exclaimed Belle.

"Then likely we will be without breakfast," responded Cora. "But here we are. Who has the key?"

Belle opened the door. "The light is out!" she whispered. "Cora," she said, aside, "I left it burning!"

CHAPTER IX

A MERRY TIME

"YES, I say it's a shame!" cried Jack, indignantly.

"Perfectly awful," confirmed Dray.

"Our meeting is at nine," announced Walter, "and when I went on the soup shift, I did not agree to do the waiting. That's not my part."

Ed tucked an end of white mosquito netting in his belt, draped it jauntily, and appeared ready to do the "waiting." Walter was frying bacon and eggs on the oil stove. Jack threw dishes at the oilcloth-covered table in imitation of a game of quoits, and he rarely missed the mark. They were about to have breakfast, and in spite of the difficulties encountered in the way of modern improvements omitted in the arrangement of Camp Couldn't (the camp got that name for a million reasons), the boys were having a fine time.

"That coffee will be cold," protested Dray, "and my doctor says cold coffee is slow poison. I prefer my poison quick." The joke about Dray's doctor was that Dray never knew a doctor other

than the medical inspector at school. He had such astonishingly good health that they used the idea of sickness in reference to him as a "counter irritant."

"But this stove is a trifle small," said Walter. "What do you say we buy that one from Camp Cattle? It's a peach."

"If the Cattle crowd have a good stove they won't sell it," replied Jack. "You will likely find a second-hand flue in it, or a rubber hose leader. Those boys are brilliant. If we need a new stove let it be from Duke's, with a cast-iron guarantee."

"Right-o," seconded Dray. "The cast-iron is always useful about a camp. But I say, what about the racket at the Mote last night? That sister of yours, Jack, is wasting her talents. She ought to be chief of a detective bureau."

"Cora is all right," Jack returned, proudly. "And while we are on the subject, and not to brag, of course, I might say that some of the other girls are in the same class. First few years they came out to the woods I used to be rather doubtful, but now we often find that the maids can take care of the masters; don't we, Wallie? More of that odor, please. I wonder why bacon turns all to odor when it's cooked up!"

"There are only two more pieces of odor left," complained Walter, "and I'd like the smell myself."

"Oh, all right. I have had more than enough." Jack waved a disdainful hand loftily. "I believe, as it is, I should be more careful what I eat."

A huge, very hard bun, the sort found only in bakeries near Summer resorts, hit Jack squarely in the face. Without any comment he caught it, cut it in half, and with a tin spoon plastered it with butter. Then he put "the lid on it," and tried to get it between his teeth. It was heroic exercise, but Jack had been trained at a reputable college, and had learned to eat what he wanted.

"But those duffers, the land men," continued Dray, "what are they after the girls for? I had an idea one of them must be trying to claim relationship with the fair Freda. He kept so close to her when she was out after Denny."

"Relationship!" Jack repeated, with a laugh. "You almost hit it, Dray. I guess the bear would like to be her first cousin, for he is trying to get her goods and chattels from her."

"How?"

"Oh, we must not go into that; at least not just yet. I promised Cora not to be hasty with Moran. He's the 'gent' who is supposed to be president of the company."

"The one who wears the Panama? I wonder if anyone would think of haste in connection with that duffer. It took him just one hour to buy three soft crabs from some kids at the dock yester-

day," said Walter. "I wouldn't like to be his messmate. But I don't like his eye; it's made on the bias."

"Yes, always looks as if it were going to slip out of the socket," confirmed Jack. "Well, I hope the girls won't go in too deep with their schemes. Those fellows are from little old N'Yawk."

"Quick!" whispered Walter. "There's that Black. If he lays eyes on your plates he'll lick them."

The last morsels of food were crammed into mouths before the call from the neighboring camper was answered.

"Come right in," Ed said, finally, "and help yourself. 'Have you had your grape fruit?'"

"Oh, no," sighed Tom Black, "I didn't feel exactly right this morning." (He brushed a brown hand across his brow.) "Nerves, I guess."

"Nerves? Grub!" shouted Jack. "Didn't I see a can marked 'soup' in your back yard this a. m.?"

"Might have, but I didn't. Else I would have had soup."

"There were grubbers around last night," went on Jack, "and we thought we found a thread that matches your sweater, sticking to a nail in our grub box."

"My sweater is not ripped that I can see," re-

plied Tom, innocently, "but if you are so kind I might take it. Don't think we put our sewing boxes in the kit, come to think of it."

"It will be ripped presently," announced Ed. "We have reason to suspect the Cattle; in fact, we have engaged counsel."

"The motor girls, I fancy, will defend you," said Tom, nonchalantly, "but I assure you, you will have no case. We are absolutely without grub; in fact, our case is pitiable."

"And you had a 'Doins' last night," Dray reminded him. "Now, Tom, we want to be fair, but we have arranged to form a housewives' league for the purpose of swiping systematically. For instance," (here he got a burnt match and tried to trace something on the oilcloth), "if we have company, and no olives, we could go over to your cupboard, take a bottle and deposit in its stead, say, a can of beans."

"Great!" shouted Tom, tossing up his cap, that landed on the flaming oil stove. "You should not waste oil," he said, as he rescued the cap. "It's always wise to turn out the stove when you take off the pan."

"The meeting is to be held in our living room," Ed said, pointing outside to a bench made of a tree limb *au naturel*. "When we have formed our committees and settled on our constitution——"

This last word seemed to give every boy present a sort of agony, for each began to "feel for his constitution," as if that important part of his physique had been lost in the camp woods.

"I wish you could settle my constitution," remarked Tom. "Once I get that settled, I don't care what happens."

"Now, quit your fooling," returned Walter. "I have an engagement and I would like to get my housework done. Tom, help yourself to a towel, and be careful not to wipe the plates on a glass towel. You can tell the difference by the border. The dish towel is all border, the center or hole went up on the oil stove, a little trick our stove has—it does not like towels. The proper towel for the glasses is that one with the black line drawn through the middle. The black line is not important, it was put there with a single wipe of the spark plug from the *Lassie*. Ed did it, very neatly."

Tom took the towel tossed to him, and, as only a boy can, began to dry the dishes that Walter was piling in front of him. First he patted and rubbed the towel on one side of the dish that lay before him; then he turned the same dish over with a bang and repeated the patting and rubbing on the other side. After that he gave the plate a spin. If it landed right side up he left it so; if the trade-mark showed he counted it a "foul,"

and tried the trick again. How boys can get work done that way is always a mystery to girls, who find the same play labor.

"Do I stay for lunch?" Tom asked. "I suppose when a fellow helps with the general housework he is entitled to his 'keep.'"

"Oh, we would just love to have you," replied Jack, with mock seriousness, "but the fact is, we are all invited out. We lunch on the *Chelton* today," and he strutted around with such wide sweeping curves, and twists, that he knocked from the narrow board table every last bit of butter the "Couldn'ts" had in their camp. Gingerly he scooped up the top lump, that lay on the store dish, but the scraps had to be scraped up with the egg turner, and the spot on the floor (they had a board floor in the camp) had to be washed up with the dish water, when Walter finally relinquished that important commodity.

"More careful next time," commanded Dray. "I'm off to call the meeting. Where's that dinner bell?"

The "bell," a very old and very large tray, was found outside under the bench, and with a good strong stick Dray beat it furiously, until it might easily be heard by every camper on the grounds. At the first signal boys came scampering from all directions. Some carried towels—too much excited to drop them in their camps;

others dashed through the woods with sweaters on their arms, and reluctant neckties in their fists, for it was early and the campers had scarcely time to make "careful" toilets.

"Grub?" they asked in chorus. "Let us see it? Lead us to it!"

"Grub nothing!" replied Walter. "You just get outside on that bench, the overflow can take the reserved seats on the nice green moss. This meeting has been called for the purpose of organizing the Housewives' League of Crystal Bay."

"Aoo-oo-ou—oh!" came a groaning reply from those who felt able to groan. "And I left sugar in my coffee cup," wailed he with the dish towel.

"And there were perfectly good crumbs at my place," sighed Teddy, a boy with so many colors in his face that they called him "Rainbow."

"Come to order!" called Jack, banging on the tent table, which was to serve as the chairman's desk. "Every camp must qualify."

"We do! We do!" shouted the majority, the rest being engaged in a rough and tumble for places near the "door."

"The purpose of this meeting," went on Jack, ducking a lump of moss tossed in lieu of a bouquet, "is to formulate plans, whereby the humans of Prowlers' Paradise may continue to defy the birds

of the air, and the beasts of the field, and live in a perfectly human way."

"Hurrah for the humans!" shouted Rainbow, and the cheers that followed did more than merely consume time.

"Let me explain," interrupted Dray, pushing Jack from his place, and taking the stand pompously. "We have been the victims of prowlers. We have lost our soup; we also lost our cans of milk—in fact, the cruel ones took everything but our appetites, and now we propose to put a stop to such depredations. We will form a league to borrow and to lend, also to pay back, but he who taketh his brother's soup and returneth not a can of beans shall be expelled from the Prowlers' Paradise!"

"We did lose five small cans of milk," reiterated Walter to Dave, the head or chief of a big camp called "We-like-it," "and if we find the rowdy who took that he shall be court-martialed."

A commotion then started that broke up the meeting. The boys, in rolling and tumbling about, rolled Dainty, so-called because he never could get enough to eat, and because his quest showed in unweighable pounds of fat, deliberately down the small hill at the side of Camp Couldn't. Two of the Cattle did the rolling, and as Dainty made one full turn a can of milk squirmed out of his pocket.

"Robber! Thief! Traitor!" screamed the rollers, and then poor Dainty was lugged back to the camp.

Making the charge against him, and making an example of him would be too sad a tale for words; sufficient to say that the meeting adjourned at the request of a peace commission.

When the last visitor had been "shooed" away and the Couldn't's had carefully prepared for the lunch to be taken on the *Chelton* (although Ed claimed that Walter had appropriated his most becoming tie, and that the shade of tan rather marred Wallie's own "tannery" effect), the boys finally put the camp flap down good and tight, and were off to the bay.

CHAPTER X

TOO MUCH JOY

FAR out in the pretty bay the *Chelton* was anchored. It was arranged that the luncheon should be given too far from land to get anything in supplies that might have been forgotten. In fact, it was to be a test meal, such as might be a necessity in case of "shipwreck" or accident.

It was such a day as sometimes makes early Summer copy Spring, when the mists of morning mingle with the sun's rays, and send up shafts of haze to pillar the sky from land or water.

There had been great preparations for this salt water lunch. The girls, enthusiastic over the possibilities, had vied with one another in arranging the affair.

Dray ran his boat, the *Dixie*, alongside, and together the fleet of two comprised what the boys termed a "White House Lunch." The cooking was all done on the *Chelton* and the eatables were handed over the brass rail to Lottie and Marita, who served as waitresses on the *Dixie*. First there were lettuce sandwiches, rolled. . . . my girl who

can successfully roll bread and lettuce is termed proficient by the cooking teachers, and it was a tie between Belle and Cora as to who did the most and best of the rolling.

With the lettuce came the greatest treat to the boys—homemade crab salad—home caught crabs and handmade dressing thereon.

“I caught the biggest crab,” declared Lottie, handing the wooden plate to Belle. “Isn’t that fine!”

“Finest!” she repeated, enthusiastically. “But say! Why don’t the boys catch crabs?”

The boys did not waste time asking questions. Lettuce sandwiches! Crab salad! They would be serving frappé next!

“Eat plenty of salad,” Cora ordered. “We spent all yesterday evening crabbing.”

“Will—we—eat—it?” exclaimed Walter. “I won’t dare look at a frying pan again this week, and my term ends with the week,” he said, between bites.

Next came baked potatoes. These had been done on the electric toaster, right aboard the *Chelton*, and while scarcely a correct following for salad, the first was given as an appetizer, and the potatoes as food.

The latter were served on the smallest of wooden plates, with the most extravagant little

butter plates—really sauce or cream “thimbles,” all fluted and shaped from white paper.

A dozen of these cups had been Belle’s contribution to the feast. She spied them at the news stand, over at the point, and could not leave them.

Dried beef went with the potatoes, also dill pickles, and while Cora kept the electric toaster going, and saw to it that the “kitchen” did not run out of hot water from a reserve tank, the other girls took turns eating their own lunches. Of course, as the boys were guests, it was important their wants should be first supplied, a matter not easily managed, as the girls soon found out.

“More! More!” called Ed, who was eating the browned potato skin, or bark, with unmistakable relish. “Potatoes are good for the nerves!”

“Robber!” shouted Jack, grabbing a second supply that had just been adjusted on Ed’s plate. “Potatoes are good for the lungs, and I am—winded.”

“I should like just a tiny bit more crab,” simpered Dray. “Fish is good for——”

“We have something more,” Cora announced, “don’t each too much solid stuff.”

“We couldn’t,” declared Belle, “not if we kept eating for the rest of our mortal lives, it wouldn’t be too much.”

“There are the ‘Likes’!” announced Lottie, in-

dicating a canoe gliding up the bay, in which were two members of the "We-like-it" camp. "Now we will have to hide things."

"Hide things!" Belle tossed her sweater over her plate as she saw the canoe. "We are lost!"

"Oh, let us invite them alongside," suggested Lottie, who, up to that moment had been so busy with setting out plates that she had scarcely spoken to the visitors. "We have plenty of stuff."

"Nix, nary, not much!" cried Ed, in protest. "That's 'Dainty' there, the stroke, and if he gets in here he'll eat the dish pan and the cooker. I say, young ladies should be most careful what sort of fellows they associate with."

But in spite of this the "Likes" were invited. Possibly they smelled the eatables, for they came up to the side of the *Chelton* as nicely as if they had set out from shore with that intention.

"Thanks," called Dainty, the fat one, "we would be pleased to," although no one had asked him to do anything.

"Delighted," affirmed Kent, the other of the party. "We sent our cards by messenger."

The canoe bobbed up and down, until Cora took an extra rope from the *Chelton* and threw it to Dainty, who in turn tied it to a small hook in the green *Snake*. This served to keep the canoe from capsizing as Dainty and Kent crept into the *Chelton*.

Just what saved all three boats from being turned upside down in the racket that followed only Neptune knows, for in their delight at seeing real food the boys from the "Likes" grew so impetuous that the "Couldn'ts" felt called upon to interfere.

Crabs, sandwiches, potatoes—each in turn were hailed with gales of glee, until the girls fell back exhausted with the strain of providing and cooking.

"Let me, let me," begged Dray, "I know exactly how to handle electric appliances. I press my neckties—with an electric iron."

He was over into the *Chelton*, and piling more potatoes under the little tin cover on the toaster, before anyone had time to answer.

"Turned or unturned?" he asked, surveying a smoking potato critically.

"Both or neither," answered the famished Dainty between gasps.

"I'll take my coffee now," announced Jack, sitting back in the cushions, and flicking an imaginary speck from his sweater.

"Now, you must wait," Cora ordered. "We have not caught up to you yet. We are only at the entree."

Lottie declared she never had such a splendid time in her life, and the brightness of her cheeks catching the flame from her eyes bore out this

statement. Marita, too, seemed to have "shook her cocoon," Jack said, his economy of language scarcely making up for the little difference in "shook" and "shaken." Certainly she managed to climb from one boat to another with remarkable alertness, while Bess, Belle and Cora acted like up-to-date society maidens, only they acted a little in advance of the "date" usually adhered to.

"And do we have to leave these shores?" wailed Ed, sipping a real good cup of coffee. "Why not anchor here for now and for eternity!"

"I thought you liked camping," said Belle. "Surely you are not tired of housekeeping. Doesn't it run smoothly?"

"Sure," replied Ed, "but the grub is the trouble. I wonder why mammas, with good moral intentions, train little boys to eat?"

"Do you see those clouds," remarked Cora, "they are just swooping down on us, and we are miles from home. My, but it is going to be a quick shower!"

The young people had been enjoying themselves so much that not until Cora spoke did they realize that the sky had become overcast.

"Oh, I'm scared to death," cried Marita. "Those clouds are so near—you would think they would touch the water!"

"Oh, aren't they black!" gasped Belle.

"Come, get everything under cover," called

Jack, thinking first of the danger to the girls and their boat. "Dray can get his awning up quickly enough, but this one has not been opened yet."

"You boys just tie your canoe tight to us," Cora said, as the two visitors were about to climb into their frail skiff. "You would be washed out during the storm that's coming. Here, Bess, hold this," handing Bess one end of the awning tie. "Belle, can you keep that rope taut?"

It was astonishing how quickly the scene of enjoyment turned to one of alarm. Those of the girls who were active and eager to assist in making things safe, did not suffer so much from fright as did they who took time to watch the clouds. The first severe storm of Summer usually has a more terrifying effect upon the timid ones than those that may follow, and this one certainly was a "star" for a starter.

The lightning soon began to flash intermittently and the thunder to rumble. The clear expanse of horizon afforded such a wide view of the storm that it was small wonder those out in the bay feared for their safety.

"Oh!" wailed Marita, as one flash of lightning seemed to dart directly at the brass rail of Dray's boat. "I thought I was struck!"

Her words had not been uttered before the clap of thunder followed. This had that queer, deep sound peculiar to the water, and certainly the

heart of the storm seemed to hover over the little fleet.

All over the bay sail boats, canoes, motor boats, row boats and every sort of craft were making for shore, but in most of these there were little or no goods that might be damaged by rain or waves, while both the *Dixie* and the *Chelton* would have suffered severely had they encountered a downpour uncovered.

The awnings were up at last, and Jack had started the *Chelton*. Directly after that the chug of the *Dixie* was heard.

Then it was all storm! Raging! Roaring! Which way could two small motor boats hope to plough their way in such a fury of wind, rain and lightning?

The waves had assumed the proportions of billows, and every time a boat lifted with the crest, a huge bank of water would break over it.

Jack clung to the steering wheel, and Cora never took her eyes off the engine. But how they whirled and twirled! There was the *Dixie*! It was keeping near—one good thing. The canoe had broken loose and was soon lost to sight. No one bewailed it; there was too serious work at hand for that.

“Let me look after the gas!” begged Kent of Cora. He was at her elbow, but she had insisted on personally attending to the machine.

"I know it better, perhaps," she shrieked back, "but stay close. If I cannot manage I will let you know!"

One terrific clap, then a roar sounded in the ears of all, but seemed to paralyze Lottie.

She fell in a heap and lay speechless. Up to this time she had been half sitting in the bottom of the boat.

"She's struck!" shrieked Belle. Then Cora left the engine to Kent and took charge of the senseless girl.

CHAPTER XI

THE RESCUE

THE coffee that stood on the still warm electric stove proved a valuable aid in restoring the stunned Lottie. She had not been struck; her nerves had simply given out, and she had collapsed.

Finally she opened her eyes.

"I'm all right now," she said faintly, and it was evident the shock had dulled her terror, at least.

"Just lie still," whispered Cora, encouragingly. "The storm will soon be over."

"The storm?" Lottie repeated. Then she closed her eyes again, but this time it was only exhaustion, not faintness.

The other girls had been roused to activity by Lottie's condition. They could now see a rift in the clouds, and one after another hurried to say that the storm was breaking, and it was not so bad; that boats could be seen, and perhaps they would soon sight land.

But those at the wheels of the boats knew how little they could do in the way of steering. Every

time the wheel was turned one way the force of the rollers would wash it completely around. In fact they were making absolutely no progress, and might almost as well have allowed the powerless craft to submit to the fury of the waters.

Cora realized this, as did the boys, but the other girls, except perhaps Bess, felt more secure as the sound of the motor indicated motion. The clouds were lifting, but the force of the storm seemed to be coming in from sea, and had little to do with the appearance of the sky.

"Oh, if help would only come!" Cora whispered to Bess. "I'm afraid another and worse storm is gathering!"

"Don't give up," replied the girl, her own face gray in the mist and spray that covered the deck even under the awnings.

"I—see—something bobbing up and down over there!" Cora continued. "See! It is—a big, strong boat, perhaps a lifeboat!"

"Let us hope so," answered Bess, fervently.

Not one word could Cora exchange with Jack, he was too far from her to hear her voice. The *Dixie* was still near enough to be sighted, but how the boys managed to keep her so was as remarkable to themselves as to those on the *Chelton*.

"That's a boat, all right," said Bess with more vigor in her voice, "and it looks like one from the life-saving station."

Cora peered anxiously in the direction of the speck that played upon the waves.

"Hey!" yelled Jack, "there comes Denny!"

"Denny!" repeated Cora wonderingly.

"Oh, there's Freda!" called Belle, jumping up from the bottom of the boat and promptly falling back again.

"It's Freda and Denny, and someone else?" asked Bess, breathlessly. "Oh, what a mercy!"

"It's a boy," declared Kent. "See the rain-hat and slicker?"

"Yes, and see Freda's hair floating out from under that rubber hat!" insisted Bess. "Oh, I know it's Freda, and I can see Denny plainly!"

The boat was coming nearer. On the crest of a roller it fairly soared towards them. Then Cora saw it was Denny and Freda, with another man whom they did not know.

"Head up into it!" came a voice from the dory, for even in a storm Denny knew how to make his voice carry over the water.

Jack heard, and swung the wheel toward the left. That would put them "into the storm," instead of on the edge of it.

At that moment the *Dixie* shot past and dashed right up to the dory.

"Here," called Jack, "can you make it to get in here?" This was called to those in Denny's boat.

"Not now!" shouted back the man. "Keep close!"

The roar of the storm increased. Just as Cora had predicted, the new squall was worse than the first. For some moments all three boats tossed and tumbled as if they had neither master nor man, but it was the *Chelton* that righted herself first.

By an ungiven signal the three boats got into line. The dory was directly in the center and the two motor boats served to shield it from the waves that lashed them on either side.

"Quick! Freda!" yelled Cora, grasping the line Denny tossed to her. "You can climb in! We can hold it tight!"

Like a sprite, the girl in the yellow slicker and rubber hat made for the highest end of the boat, measured her distance to the *Chelton*, and while Kent and Cora strained to hold the rope steady, sprang.

It was not the distance, which was but a few feet, but the uncertainty of the boats' motion that made the leap perilous. But Freda landed safely in the *Chelton*.

"None too soon!" gasped Cora, pressing her arms around the wet oilskin coat. "See where they have gotten to now!"

The boats had drifted apart again. The girls clung to Freda as if she had really brought them

safely to shore, instead of adding her own weight to their burden, but it was the message from land that reassured them.

"Isn't it dreadful!" moaned Lottie, still trembling from her collapse.

"No!" replied Freda, cheerfully. "It isn't so bad out there. But we knew what it was on this bar, and could tell by the wind just about where you were drifting. If Jack will let me take the wheel I will follow Denny's orders and ride into it. Then we can go around the island—and see a blue sky!"

"Blue sky!" came the exclamation from the girls in unison.

"Certainly. But I must have the wheel, Jack."

Having satisfied them that she could run the boat, Freda changed places with Jack, while Cora let her brother take up her watch beside Kent. Then Cora went to the steering wheel with Freda.

"Don't be afraid," the latter said. "I have ridden out worse storms than this with Denny. They have a way of turning things upside down, but you are all right as long as you can keep well on top."

She was driving directly into the smother. The girls shut their eyes, and it must be admitted that more than one put their fingers in their ears, for indeed the roar was deafening.

"There are Denny and the man getting into the

Dixie! " breathed Cora. " Oh, I am so glad, for it must have been dreadful to row that boat."

" It *was* no joke, but Denny likes hard work," Freda answered. " Now here is where we ride it out! "

Every bit of power was turned on and with one well directed plunge the *Chelton* was shot through what seemed to be a " comber " as if she had been a submarine.

" Oh! " gasped Cora. Freda dropped into the " V " space at the base of the wheel. Still, she did not take her hands from the spokes. It was a serious moment. What if the boat could not ride those waves? The time it took to get out of the harder waves could not be estimated by the hands of a clock or watch; but in gasping breaths, thumping hearts, pale faces and fears—for boys as well as for girls—it must have been a long, long time.

Finally Freda stood up.

" There! " she exclaimed. " What did I tell you? "

" Sky! " they all shouted, clapping their hands like children.

" And—it—took a girl—to—do it! " exclaimed Jack, who would not have been blamed for hugging Freda had the opportunity offered. Instead, however, he made his way back to the wheel and allowed Freda and Cora a chance to

look at their blistered hands, for both girls had been tugging at the spokes.

"Who would believe a storm would end like that?" said Belle, with the relief that comes so quickly upon intense strain.

"We have got to keep in out of the rain for a while," Cora cautioned. "There are enough water-loaded clouds over there yet to dampen our enthusiasm."

This proved to be true, for torrents of rain followed in the wake of the vanishing thunder clouds.

But the wind had ceased, and the waves soon quieted. With more than a sigh of relief the *Chelton* girls and boys fell into the course made now by the *Dixie*, for in that boat Denny Shane was at the wheel.

CHAPTER XII

THE CALM

A MORE delightful scene than Crystal Bay presented, two hours after the squall, could scarcely be imagined. To the motor girls it was particularly effective, as may easily be imagined. Coming back around the island the *Dixie* picked up the lost canoe, so this left nothing to be worried over in the record of adventure.

"How do you feel, Lottie?" Cora asked, when all had landed safely and stood looking over the waters that could be so deceptive.

"Oh, I am all right, really," answered Lottie, a little ashamed that she should have allowed herself to give way.

"But be careful," cautioned Cora. "Take it easy for the rest of the day, at least. It doesn't do to try too much."

"Grandmother!" Lottie answered, with an affectionate squeeze of Cora's arm. "What about you? Who did all the engineering in the storm? And who is still 'on deck' giving orders?"

"Oh, I am strong," replied Cora, though strong as she was the last few hours had told in the paler tint of her cheeks.

The return of the storm-stricken ones attracted crowds of bungalowers and campers to the beach; for, of course, craft of all sorts had been caught in the gale. The center of interest, however, was the *Chelton*, for that boat had already gained a reputation at Crystal Bay.

Not one person came in from the bay in dry clothes; in fact, many were drenched, and naturally the girls showed the effects of the storm more conspicuously than did the boys. Bess happened to be the one "who got the worst of it," among the motor girls—perhaps because there was more of her for the waves to hit.

"You are certainly a beauty," commented Belle, who had been more fortunate in dodging the water. "You look like a swimming lesson in the first stage."

"I feel as if I needed artificial respiration," replied Bess, good-humoredly, "but I want to forget it all—all but this. Isn't this wonderful?"

"Almost enough to make up for the danger," Belle returned. "But wasn't Freda splendid? What good training she must have had to be able to manage that boat. No one else except Cora could have done it, and she was unfamiliar with the tricks of the bay. I do feel so sorry for Freda

and her mother!" This last was said with a wistful sigh, for all the members of the Mote were now much attached to the motherly Mrs. Lewis.

"Cora must have known those men were going to put the 'for sale' sign on the cottage, when she hurried so to get Freda and her mother over to our place the other night," went on Bess. "I knew there was something more important than merely taking care of us."

"Oh, of course, that's just like Cora. Fancy Mrs. Lewis never hearing a word about it. If she had been in the house when they tacked that sign on——"

"It must be perfectly awful to lose everything that way; to feel it is all an injustice, yet not to be able to prove one's own claim," said Belle. "Tricky business men are worse to watch than spiteful girls, and we always thought *they* were about all that we could handle. There's Ted and Jean. Just look at their boat!"

Among the last of the storm-bound ones to "enter port" were Ted and Jean, members of "Camp All Alone." They certainly presented a sorry spectacle, as they came up to the dock.

"How do you feel?" asked Lottie, who was down near the water's edge, in spite of Cora's admonition.

"I feel like playing a spaghetti obligato on a

big hot bowl of soup," replied Jean. "That would be the song to reach my heart."

"The sun is clucking, girls," announced Walter. "She may set at any time. Is there aught to eat at the Mote? Let us thither. We intended to go to the store before tea."

"After giving you your lunch!" exclaimed Cora, in surprise.

"But, don't you see, that is why we didn't get to the store. You are really liable for our suppers. Don't you think so, fellows?" he asked.

"Not only liable, but accountable," added Ed. "Of course we will go home and dress. I wonder what on earth the squall did to headquarters?" he asked, suddenly realizing that the camp had had need of secure moorings during the last two hours.

"Let's look," suggested Dray, who had now moored the *Dixie* securely, while Jack and Cora had attended to the *Chelton*.

"Oh, you ought to see your tent," sang out a little fellow, who wore little beside a shirt and bathing trunks. He had been out in the squall and had, very likely, enjoyed it immensely.

"What's the matter with it?" inquired Jack.

"Oh, it's all flippy-floppy," replied the urchin. "But some lady saw it goin' and she tied it back to the stakes."

"Some lady?" repeated Jack.

"Mrs. Lewis, likely," suggested Cora. "I hope she did not go out in that down-pour to tie the tents."

"I rather hope she did," admitted her brother. "I had some things in that tent not warranted rainproof. Hey, fellows!" he called to the other members of Camp Couldn't. "Hurry up. Our tent was struck, they say."

At the word the crowd from the beach ran helter-skelter through the woods toward the camp colony. Surely there was enough excitement around Crystal Bay that afternoon to last for some time, and there was every prospect now of new adventures developing.

"Any tents down?" asked Dainty, as he puffed along.

"Thinking of spilled grub?" queried Walter. "Nothing doing. We have a salvage corps department to our housewives' league, you know, and they are bound to protect the members from bandits. So you may just run along and see what is going on at the Cattle."

The storm had played havoc in the woods. Pine branches had scratched deep furrows in the white sand paths, beautiful bushes of blooming mountain laurel and mountain pinks were shorn of every bloom, and the wild roses were scattered like pink butterflies on the catch leaves of shrubs.

The first camp to be met by the boys was Camp

Hyphen. This was quite a pretentious establishment with a smaller tent adjunct. The adjunct stood for the hyphen, and it now lay in a heap like a discarded potato sack, its store of supplies settled uncertainly in nearby bushes.

"My, and they had just joined the League," wailed Jack. "I suppose we will all have to put up for the reinforcements."

"We are not an insurance company," Ed objected. "Why should we make good for a storm?"

"Because we have a calamity clause. You had better look up your rules and regulations, young man. The last time I saw them they were pasted with a daub of good family flour on our back door."

"Thank goodness the rain will have suspended our constitution," Ed replied. "That back door never could have gone dry through the torrent. Don't you remember how the small showers doused it?"

"We do," Walter answered, "and as we have the only written rules, that same fact of the back door may stand us in well."

"Pikers!" Jack called them with a laugh. "But will you observe the Hys! They are going to rebuild!"

A hyphenated name seemed the worst of luck for this camp, for there was no strong pole or

cast iron bar to *hold* the two tents together, and the "hy" was merely a strip of ground that gave extra play to the wind. The smaller tent was now being dragged from the bed of wet sand into which it had partly buried itself, and the campers were struggling heroically to get it back to its pegs.

"Too bad!" called Walter, sympathetically.

"Worse than that," replied one fellow, who looked as if he might have been shipwrecked.

"But we are insured—in the league, you know," shouted another member of the demolished camp. "We are coming up for supper."

"You are?" returned Dray. "Say, fellows," to his own camp company, "the best thing we can do is to take what stuff we find left and hide up at the Mote. Those fellows will come down on us and won't believe about the washed-away constitution. Who on earth put that indemnity clause in, anyhow?"

"Oh, Clem did. He's studying engineering, and I suppose he is lonesome for his math. We ought to make him pay the assessment. But I agree with Dray," continued Walter. "We ought to 'beat it' up to the Mote, quick. There are other tents flopping around, and everybody will be good and hungry, you can be sure."

"Queer how old Denny made for his shack as soon as we got in," Ed remarked. "I wonder if he thought that would be demolished?"

"No, not likely," Jack said, "but the old fellow was pretty wet and played out. He's plucky, all right, and I don't believe we would be in yet but for him and Freda. But he is old, just the same, and only his pluck keeps him up to it. I would like to have been more decent to him, but he won't give one a chance. We must fix it up some way, though."

"We sure must," agreed the others.

"There's another," announced Jack, as a perfectly flat tent almost blocked their way. This was evidently deserted, for not a boy was to be seen, either lamenting or trying to right the canvas.

"Funny," commented Ed. "They must have gone to the hotel."

"Hotel!" exclaimed Jack. "Why, they borrowed a pint of our kerosene this morning. They may have gone to jail."

"Let's run," suggested Ed. "This funeral march is getting on my nerves. Besides, I am anxious to see the Couldn't."

In a few minutes the boys sighted their own tent. It looked all right.

"Thank goodness!" breathed Dray, fervently. "I really couldn't stand any more nerve-racking experiences."

"We look intact," said Walter. "I wonder if my dress suit is still unwrinkled."

"Your overalls?" asked Jack, mimicking Wal-

ter's tone of voice. "Oh, I am sure they are perfectly all right, for I saw them in the wood box just before we left."

"Brute!" responded Walter. "But I say! What's that? We are inhabited!"

Sounds of voices issued from inside the tent. Jack dashed ahead and raised the flap.

"Robbers! Thieves! Police!" he yelled, then he had to dodge something.

"We are here for our rights," sang out a strong voice. "We demand our insurance!"

"Seems to me the demand is rather violent," replied Ed, as the Couldn'ts saw what was going on. The entire tent was filled with boys from the wrecked camps, and they were making away with practically everything in the line of eatables they could lay their hands on.

"Clear out!" ordered Dray, "or we will call the police. What sort of way is this to keep law and order?"

"The only way," replied Hal, a boy from the "Mist." "We couldn't even keep up in starvation, but with something to sustain us we might be able to keep the law. As a matter of fact, it was civic pride that compelled us to come in here and eat."

There was no help for it now, the Couldn'ts had been robbed. Even their party paper napkins were being made into balls.

"Isn't it awful!" moaned Jack, falling into the one dry spot on the sandy floor. "And we were the real benefactors of this ranch. That's the way goodness is repaid in this hard, cruel world."

Nobody noticed the sermon—everyone was too busy looking for food. Finally Walter and Ed, after a private conference with Dray and Jack, decided to give to the unfortunates all the food they possessed, "in order to avert worse damage to their property."

"But we are dining out," Ed put in, "and it's only fair that you should take the provender home. We want to wash our little faces, you know. We dine with ladies."

"Oh, we will pay it all back," declared Clem, who was scooping up empty boxes in the hope of being agreeably disappointed in their contents as compared with their weight.

"Yes—you—will!" mocked Jack, "when we can skate on the sand of the desert. But hustle. There's not another scrap around. Land that oil can, Ted. It's empty."

After considerable urging, ordering and coaxing, the Couldn'ts rid themselves of their uninvited guests, and were once again in possession of their own tents.

"Did the girls invite us?" asked Dray. "I hate to intrude."

"They did not," replied Jack, "and we are not

going to intrude. We are just going over to thank Mrs. Lewis for saving this camp from destruction. She hammered down those stakes. Look at them!" he ordered. "Ed, did you ever wield a hammer as truthfully as that?"

CHAPTER XIII

SUSPICION

"OF course we can get supper for everyone," declared Mrs. Lewis, cordially, when Cora spoke of the determination of the boys to come down upon the Mote for tea. "We have plenty of food."

"You are a wonder, Mrs. Lewis," declared Cora. "You always have a full larder. I don't see where it comes from, for you don't even use up the budget."

"It's a matter of experience," answered Mrs. Lewis. "When one has to do things, my dear, one learns how. I am so glad we have macaroni cooked. Boys love big, steaming dishes."

Cora gave a sigh of relief. What a blessing Mrs. Lewis had proven to be! After finding themselves shut out of their house by a trick of the land agents she and her daughter had taken up a permanent residence in the girls' camp. Freda, in spite of all opposition, had installed herself as "maid." She insisted on waiting on the table, and attending to rooms, and helping her mother gen-

erally, although the girls wanted her to be one of them. Everyone declared that her mother, with her wonderful management and activity, more than made up for Freda being a visitor at the Mote.

Freda seemed happier now than when she shared the little cottage with her mother, but this was easily understood. Under the new arrangement Mrs. Lewis was earning an honest and comfortable living, and Freda was more than willing to assist her in every way possible. Before, they had lived in constant dread of the land agents putting them out of their home. Even the fact that the sign "For Sale" had been placed on the cottage did not seem so unbearable, for the girls and boys had insisted that that was only a "scare" on the part of the land agents, and that while the town constable would not interfere to the extent of taking down the sign, he had promised to investigate the rights of those who put it up.

But town constables are slow and timid when strangers, with big-brimmed hats, and plenty of cigars, come from the city, and order papers signed at so much per sign—for the constable.

The boys had come, and the supper was almost ready. Lottie looked as pretty and as well as ever, for she had dressed in a chic pink frock, and with a pink snood binding her brow looked as fresh as though she had just come from the hands of

a beauty specialist. After all, such vigorous treatment and baths of spray as the girls had encountered all that afternoon amounted to just that—beauty treatment; and Lottie was not the only one whose cheeks glowed, and in whose eyes shone the light that comes only from youth and health.

The rumpus that always followed the boys' arrival was in full sway, Jack and Ed chasing Bess around the bungalow to make her give up an imaginary lost scarf pin, while Dray and Walter contented themselves with the less violent exercise of rocking on the front porch, where the other girls were scattered. They certainly were "scattered," for there was so much to tell and hear of the afternoon's adventure that each girl chose her own listener and her own corner.

Everyone seemed deeply absorbed in this when Freda appeared at the door with the warning bell. That meant that in five minutes the tea bell would ring—only it was going to be dinner to-night.

"That sounds fine," Dray told Freda, who in her blue linen sailor suit looked quite as well as the young ladies who put in most of their time "leisuring." "Our Belle is not nearly as aristocratic as that."

"I hope dinner will bear out the reputation," Freda replied, a bit shyly, for Dray was somewhat of a stranger to her.

"Dinner will make that reputation immortal," Jack declared, as he and Ed gave up their chase and joined the others on the porch. "But hello! Here comes Denny! And he has no pipe! Something surely is wrong."

Everyone ceased chattering as Denny Shane appeared on the tan bark path.

"Hello, there, Denny!" called Jack, getting up from his porch chair. "What's up?"

"A-plenty," answered Denny with a sweep of his cap that took everyone in the greeting. "Where's the Widder Lewis?"

"Oh, what's the matter, Denny?" asked Freda, aghast. "Can't you tell me first? You know how weak mother is."

"'Tis nothing bad," replied Denny, as he sat down on the bottom step of the porch, in spite of all invitations to come up and have a chair. He settled his cap more securely on his gray head. "I just want to—tell her something."

"But what?" insisted Freda, who now sat beside the old sailor on the step. "I know all about the business, you know."

"Do come in, Denny," pleaded Cora. "It will be easier to talk in the living room. We young folks can go into the dining room and start our dinner while you settle it all quietly among yourselves."

"Thank you, Miss," Denny replied, promptly

accepting Cora's invitation. "That will be the best way, I guess."

Famished as everyone seemed to be, the visit of Denny somewhat shifted the interest from appetites, and curiosity strayed from the dining room toward the living room.

"What can have happened?" whispered Belle to Marita. "Denny looks positively—angry."

"Doesn't he?" Marita replied. "I suppose it is something about Freda's property; don't you think so?"

"Likely."

The voices from the other room, that had been subdued, now rose in tones of surprise. Freda and her mother were both trying to talk at the same time, evidently.

Cora was serving the dinner and endeavoring not to spoil it. The boys were too hungry and too glad to eat to allow any interruption to interfere with their pleasure, but the girls were prone to whisper, and even to listen when a voice penetrated the room.

"It was them!" they heard Denny exclaim, "and I'll have the law on them!"

Then Freda said something like: "Can't be sure!"

"Sure as me name's Dinny Shane!" exclaimed the old man. "Who else would have tied up little Brian, the dog that was never tied before in

his life! Sure I'd like to 'a caught them at it," and he brought his fist down hard on something.

The boys and girls exchanged glances.

"Something doing," ventured Jack. "I'll bet Denny has seen the witches."

"No — banshees," corrected Ed. "Witches aren't ripe this time of year. But Cora, don't let us keep you. Really, Walter would love to take your place up head there, when you have finished."

Cora *was* anxious to join in the conversation with Freda and her mother, Freda having whispered to her that they would like to have her do so as soon as the dinner was over.

"Then I will be excused," she said, "although I hope you won't hurry."

"Don't be alarmed," said Walter. "It's very bad to eat in a hurry."

"I'll serve," proposed Bess, "I know just how much everyone has had, and how much more they *ought* to have. Dray, you cannot have another bit of pudding."

Dray was stretching far out for the dish. He did love apple slump. And Mrs. Lewis knew just the right amount of cinnamon to season with.

A hush followed Cora's entrance to the living room. Not a single word or exclamation escaped through the Summer hangings that hid the narrow door.

"Do you think it's a conspiracy?" remarked

Walter. "I'm glad we had dinner first. I had no idea that a hurricane went straight to the hunger zone like that."

"You would be a star to go up North," commented Ed. "Just fancy carrying stuff in your pockets and starving because the exact latitude for grub had not been reached—wow!"

"I would insist upon being made chairman of the latitude committee," replied Walter, "and my moves would be swift and certain."

The door opened and Freda entered. She was not exactly all smiles, but the serious look on her face was not deep enough to cause comment.

"I came to fetch your coffee," she announced, cheerfully. "You must think we are planning to dynamite something," she added.

"Oh, worse than that," replied Dray, getting one more spoonful of slump on the sly. "We thought you were taking a negative vote on the coffee. Nerves, at night, you know."

"Let me help you," insisted Belle. "I am almost stiff from sitting, or maybe it is from the way I *wasn't* sitting in the bottom of the boat."

"Very likely," affirmed Jack. "I would not be surprised if we had to come around in the morning with nippers to get the kinks out. I see one forming, right now, in Lottie's cheek."

"We will be stiff, I am sure," added Bess, "although our muscles ought to be in good form."

"When you have finished," Freda whispered to Belle, "we want to give Denny something."

"Of course," Belle replied. "How selfish we are, sitting here 'gabbing,' and neither you nor your mother has had supper yet. I'll serve coffee at once."

"Don't hurry," Freda said. "We have time enough."

Everyone, however, seemed to guess at once that they should make room for the next "table," and the coffee was swallowed, hastily.

"What is it?" Lottie ventured to ask Freda. "We are just dying of curiosity. What has happened?"

"Oh, I can't tell you now," Freda answered, evasively. "I guess everyone knew we were shipwrecked this afternoon."

Cora appeared at the door. "May we come to eat now?" she asked. "I have only succeeded in making Denny stay with the understanding that we won't keep him long. He is anxious to get back to his cabin."

"I am that," said Denny, following Cora into the dining room. "Can't tell what'll happen now."

"Then something *did* happen," Bess said aside, to Marita. "I can't imagine what."

"Now you must eat a good meal," Mrs. Lewis insisted to Denny. "I remember well how you always loved macaroni and cheese."

"And I remember well how you fixed it up," answered Denny, gallantly. "This is a bit like the old days; isn't it? When I used to eat you out of house and home, when Len would fetch me into your house to tempt me appetite," and he chuckled at the recollection. "Freddie, you were only a tot then, but you could climb on my knee right smart. I guess you were always a romp." This last was plainly intended as a compliment, for Denny smiled at Freda as she handed him his steaming coffee.

If the young folks thought that by special attention to Denny and his wants at the table they might get an inkling of the mystery that had so excited the old man they were disappointed, for he never betrayed a word of it, and only an occasional absent look in his sober gray eyes betokened anything unusual.

He scarcely took time to swallow the tempting food, however, when he jumped up and declared he could not stay another minute, although Cora, Freda, and Mrs. Lewis urged him to remain.

"I must run—I really must," he insisted, "and mind what I tell you," to Freda and Cora, "look out for yourselves!"

CHAPTER XIV

AN ANGRY DRUGGIST

"WE didn't want to make a fuss over it before the boys," Cora explained to a number of the girls, who, next morning, were seated about the bungalow side porch, trying to get in a few stitches of embroidery. "They would be sure to go straight at those land fellows, and we think—Denny and all of us—that the best way to do is to watch them carefully for a while."

"But what happened?" demanded Lottie, impatiently.

"We don't know exactly what, but it appears that while Denny was out, fishing us in, someone entered his shack and ransacked it."

"Burglars! What for? In that hut!" exclaimed Belle.

"We don't know that, either," continued Cora. "We can only surmise. They must have been after something that was neither money nor table silver." She laughed a little at the idea of anyone trying to rob the humble cabin of a fisherman. "The little terrier is never tied up and never

troubles anybody, but it seems he did object to the intrusion, for he has a cut on one leg, made, possibly, by a heavy shoe, and when Denny found him he was tied tight to a hook in the woodshed. Denny will never forgive whoever tied Brian."

"But did the thieves take anything?" Bess wanted to know.

"Not a thing. Of course there was nothing an ordinary thief would have any use for; but it looks as if they were searching for something in particular, for everything was turned inside out. Every strip of carpet was pulled up and loose boards in the floor pried away. It really is too bad for Denny. He will have a lot of trouble getting things in order again, and you know he is neat, for a lone fisherman."

"Isn't that outrageous!" exclaimed Belle. "I think, Cora, we should have told the boys and had them make a charge against whoever may be guilty. They will be ransacking here next."

"Oh, goodness! I hope not," cried Marita. "I think we should have police protection."

"And have officers ringing our door bell all hours of the night because someone forgot to turn out the dining room light, or the side window was found unlocked," said Cora. "They have very few officers here, I should imagine, and if we really gave them something to do they might insist on doing it."

"Tell us more about it," begged Marita, who was naturally fascinated with the "scary" part.

"I only know that his shack was entered and all but torn down," said Cora. "As to who did it, or why it was done, we can only surmise. But don't talk too much about it. We want to keep it quiet."

"Why?" demanded Marita.

"Because by letting other people talk about it we may be able to trace the perpetrators. We could easily find out who knew it had happened, in that way."

"Oh, I see," Marita answered vaguely, although her tone did not indicate comprehension. "Freda and Mrs. Lewis are going out; aren't they?" This question implied "why" also.

"Yes," Cora answered again. "They have some business to attend to. I told them not to hurry back for lunch—we would attend to it. We really need the exercise."

"But I am going canoeing directly after lunch," Lottie objected.

"After lunch?" repeated Belle. "This will be before lunch—the getting ready."

"Oh, you know what I mean," Lottie grumbled. "It makes one's hands so horrid to handle cooking things."

"Were you going to paddle?" asked Cora, innocently.

"I was going to try," admitted Lottie.

"Then your hands will be in better shape from some active work," Cora added, mischievously. "It is awful to try to paddle with soft hands."

"Oh, I guess mine are not any too soft," Lottie retorted, a bit abashed that she should have fallen into the trap.

"Where are you going, Lottie?" asked Marita. "You know it is only safe to canoe near the shore. The water can be very rough sometimes."

"I don't think you ought to go in a canoe until you can swim," said Cora. "You know a canoe is the most uncertain of craft, except that it is absolutely certain to upset if you draw a breath in, when you should send a breath out. Jack says a canoe is more than human, but I won't shock your ears by saying what he thinks it is."

"I am sure there is no danger when one sits still," Lottie insisted, "but if you don't want me to go, Cora——"

"Of course I want you to go, and have a nice time," Cora explained, "but I don't want you to upset. You should wear a bathing suit and be ready to swim in case of a spill."

"Oh, I couldn't do that!" exclaimed Lottie, rather shocked. "I am going with Clem."

"Well, I hope Clem will put you in the very bottom of the boat, and not trust to a seat. Even a big cushion is wobbly," finished Cora. "Now,

young ladies, are you ready for a tramp? We have to walk to the old village this morning to shop, unless you want to go to the dock and take Frank's ferry. He will take us across for ten cents each, and we need things to eat."

"Oh, do let us walk," begged Bess. "I haven't seen half the things that grow around here."

"Do *you* grow around here?" asked Belle, maliciously, inferring that the desired walk was needed to "reduce." A withering look was the answer she received from her twin sister. Just the same the walk was decided upon, and a little later the wintergreen path was alive with voices. It was one of the delights of Summer to tramp and ramble; and in spite of the joys of motor boating the girls were not slow to appreciate the pleasures of dry land decked in various shades of foliage green and floral tints.

The mountain laurel was at its best—that little tasselled thing we call "pfingster," but which looks quite aristocratic enough to belong to the orchid family, made bouquets of itself in every appropriate spot, while the glorious rhododendrons put forth a display sufficiently beautiful and courageous to last all Summer.

"Oh, my, look at the style!" Lottie exclaimed as a party of young folks appeared before them. They were evidently coming from the Cliff Hotel, and made the most of that fact.

"There's Hilda Hastings!" Cora said, in surprise. "I didn't know she was down here."

A remarkably pretty girl, light-haired and wearing lilac shades, with a parasol that reflected that becoming tint, was Hilda. She evidently saw, and recognized Cora just as the latter spied her.

"Cora Kimball!" cried Hilda, in the delighted way that usually marks a meeting with a home friend in the midst of vacation time. "Where did you come from?"

"Oh, Hilda!" answered Cora, advancing to meet the girl who almost ran to greet her, "I am so glad to see you. We are stopping at our own little bunk—the Motely Mote—on Pine Shade Way. And where do you put up?"

Introductions followed, and girls from the Mote were plainly delighted to meet the others from a fashionable hotel. The meeting also resulted in a general invitation from the Cliff girls to the Motes to attend a hop to be given the next evening at the hotel.

"And do bring every boy you can scrape up," Hilda enjoined. "We shall be sure to need them."

"What dress?" asked Lottie the Vain.

"Linen or lace, doesn't matter in the least," declared a young girl whom they called Madge. "We will wear whatever we fall into for dinner."

"All right," answered Lottie for all, fluttering at the prospect of a real hotel hop. "We will

wear whatever we may find pressable—we have the awfullest time with wrinkles down here.”

“Don’t mind them,” answered Hilda. “Wrinkled clothes are a seaside fad, you know. If you have none you will be suspected of being the Press Club Trust. That’s a clothing club—not literary.”

With other pleasantries the two sets parted, but not until all sorts of invitations to come and visit had been extended and accepted.

“What nice girls,” the timid Marita remarked as the fashionable ones turned into the lane. “Isn’t Hilda pretty? Are they from Chelton?”

“She is and they are,” answered Cora. “But I do not see how we are going to that hop. The boys were going to take us out in a sail boat, you know.”

“Oh, I would be frightened to death in a sail boat,” objected Lottie.

“And perfectly safe in a canoe,” observed Belle. “Charlotte, that is scarcely understandable.”

“Well,” said Lottie, turning a deeper shade of pink, “I am afraid of that big pole in a sail boat. It looks as if it would sweep one’s head off every time it veers around.”

“Just duck,” advised Belle. “It’s a great teacher of the proper mode of ducking; and that is not to be despised, Lottie, whether one has to

duck harsh words, or big poles. But I want to go sailing. I can't see what fun there is in going into a stuffy hotel on a beautiful moonlight evening when we can go out on the water and see something."

"Don't you think we would see something in the Cliff ball room?" challenged Lottie.

"Peace!" called Cora, good-naturedly. "It looks as if we might have to take a vote on the question. But I can't say that the boys would be willing to accept a negative answer."

"Oh, won't they come?" Lottie asked in surprise.

"I don't believe they will forego the sail," replied Cora. "However, we won't decide until we ask them. If they want to postpone the water sport we may take in the hop."

This was looked upon as a reasonable solution of the problem, and while some of the girls hoped for the sail, perhaps an equal number wished to go to the dance.

It was a delightful morning, and the woods were fairly alive with young folk. It seemed there could be very few mothers or chaperones at Crystal Bay, for even in marketing hours it was always the girls with baskets, or the boys with huge paper bags, who were encountered. On benches along the beach, to be sure, "elders" might be found sunning themselves and ruining

their fading sight with alleged art embroideries, but in the matter of housekeeping it was youth that prevailed at the bay.

It was a long walk to the general store at the point, but there was a resting place there, and if one wanted to tarry and felt like dancing, a very accommodating young man sat near the piano ready to play at the shortest notice. Belle and Lottie usually took a twirl while Bess and Cora did the shopping, but to-day having walked instead of coming by motor boat they sank into a seat at the water's edge and watched others try the newest steps.

Around the drug counter a number of men were engaged in earnest conversation with the salesman. Belle needed cold cream and was waiting her turn to tell the clerk so.

"We just about have it," said one man to the man behind the counter. "There is no question about the legal right; it is only a matter of a lost document. We may get along without it, but we understood you were a life-long resident, knew the people, and thought perhaps you could tell us something about it. Of course we don't want anyone's time for nothing."

The clerk scratched his head and looked over his glasses. The scale was tipping with white stuff and a customer was waiting.

"That may be so," he replied, slowly, "but I

should think, young fellow, that them folks themselves would know more about their own business than anyone else. Why don't you go to them?"

"Do you think for a moment that anyone is going to do themselves out of house and home like that?" asked the taller man, angrily.

"Oh, that's the game; is it? Well, see here! Do you think for one moment that I, Bill Sparks, am going to do a poor widow out of house and home to suit you!"

He had raised his voice to angry tones, a remarkable thing for Bill to do in business hours, but those around who heard had no blame for him. The strangers left without taking up their cigars or paying for them. Bill looked after them quizzically.

"That's the way to answer that sort," he remarked to no one in particular. "Too many of them speculators around the bay, lately. Cold cream?" he inquired of Bess.

Cora had seen the men, although she was in the grocery department, and when Bess told her what she had overheard she looked troubled.

"We must not put that off another day," she told Bess. "I am convinced that those men are dishonest, for why should they go sneaking around that way? Why not ask for information from the proper persons?"

Scarcely had she spoken than Mrs. Lewis and

Freda appeared in the doorway that led from the boat landing. Freda's face was flushed, and Mrs. Lewis's was pale.

"What is it?" Cora asked, hurrying up to them.

"They have started a mill dam across the creek," replied Freda. "If they turn that water into use for mill purposes the whole shore of the bay will be ruined!"

"Don't go so fast, daughter," urged Mrs. Lewis. "We can stop them; we must get a lawyer at once."

"Of course," answered Cora, "I think they call it an injunction, or restraining papers. Who is your lawyer, Mrs. Lewis?"

"We haven't any," Freda replied for her mother. "We were told if we engaged counsel they would eat up the whole thing. Oh, isn't it dreadful!" and the brave Freda was on the verge of tears.

"I'll see Jack at once," declared Cora, "and if there are not trustworthy lawyers here we will fetch our own down from Chelton. The senior member of the firm would do anything reasonable for our family, and when mother is away she leaves Jack and me full discretion. Let us hurry back before the boys get out on the water. Bess, call Belle and Lottie."

The look of relief that spread over the wid-

ow's face was a more eloquent form of thanks than words could have been, so without further delay they all hurried to the motor boat in which Mrs. Lewis and Freda had come over. It was from a bay front hotel and had come over for the eleven o'clock mail.

The boy at the wheel started up as soon as all were seated, and as the launch was a good-sized one the trip across the bay was both comfortable and enjoyable. Of course Belle and Lottie wanted to know more than they could be told about the coming of Freda and Mrs. Lewis, so they had to content themselves with a word and a look from Cora.

The boys were at the landing as the boat came in. This was exactly what Cora had wished for.

CHAPTER XV

AN ALARM

"I WILL go to Lamberton this afternoon," declared Mrs. Lewis, after having conferred with Cora and Jack. "I know a man there who was a great friend of my husband. He told me to come to him any time I needed advice, and he is a prominent lawyer. I have never troubled him—had no good cause to until now."

"I think that would be a good plan," Jack agreed. "I fancy as soon as we come down on those fellows good and hard, they will be forced to show their hand."

So it was arranged that Mrs. Lewis should go to the town, some twenty-five miles away.

"And Freda," she said, "don't worry if I am not back until the last train, for if he should happen to be in New York I will wait for him."

"Be careful of that cut in the old road," Freda warned. "Mother, you know it is always dark through there, even in broad daylight, and after dark it is pitchy."

"I can't get any train until one o'clock," went

on Mrs. Lewis, "so, Freda, we will hurry back to the bungalow and leave everything ready for tea. We can prepare things while the girls are lunching."

"Now, you needn't do anything of the kind," objected Cora, "we girls can well enough take care of ourselves once in a while. Why, Mrs. Lewis, you have us all spoiled. We are supposed to do most of our own housekeeping in Summer camp, you know."

"Indeed, you do that now," returned Mrs. Lewis, who was more than grateful for the opportunity for work that Cora had afforded to her. "I like housekeeping when there is someone to keep for."

"You had Freda," Jack reminded her.

"And she wouldn't let me do enough to keep in practice," replied Mrs. Lewis. "Here we are, and the young ladies are stringing beans!"

"Now that is what I call sweet of you," Jack observed as he greeted the four girls, all seated around a low porch table with knives and beans plying from basket to pan. "Who told you we were coming to dine?"

"You positively are not, Brother Jack," Cora declared. "You boys think our place is an elastic delicatessen. Why, we never know whether we are going to have enough for another meal or not, and we can't go to the point again to-day."

"All right, Little Sister. If you have the heart to eat good string beans from old Henry's garden, and know that your brother is starving for a single spoonful, just go ahead. They will rest heavy on your heart, though. I warn you."

"You may help!" offered Lottie. "Just take that paper bag and scoop up the ends. Bess spilled them."

"I absolutely refuse," replied Jack, haughtily, "to be a scraper-up for such mean people. No, sir! I have just been manicured," and he gazed lovingly at his much-neglected hands.

"It does seem as if all we do is to get ready to eat and then eat," said Belle with a sigh. "I would never keep house for myself if I starved. At least, I would manage on fewer meals. We have only been to the point since breakfast and now it is time to eat again."

Cora had gone in with Freda and Mrs. Lewis and very soon afterward luncheon was announced—the beans were laid over for the evening meal. Jack stayed, of course, and wondered (so he said) why the other fellows did not come in search of him.

An hour or two later Mrs. Lewis hurried off to the little station, after promising Freda that she would be most careful of the dark road known as the "Cut."

"For, Mother dear," warned Freda, "I do

believe those land sharks would do almost anything to scare the information out of us. They have threatened to have it at any cost, you know."

"Oh! I am surprised at you being so nervous, dear," replied the mother, kissing Freda reassuringly. "I never felt less nervous. In fact, I think now things will soon be righted. Good-bye, dear. And have a good time with your friends."

Freda watched the little woman step lightly away over the white path. Then, with a sigh, she turned back to the bungalow.

"Freda! Freda!" called Bess. "You have not eaten yet, and I'm to do the dishes. Hurry this minute and just fill up! I must be finished in time for a nap, for I am nearly dead."

Freda did eat, though somehow she felt unusually depressed. Even Cora's encouraging words, given into Freda's ear when no one else was at hand, did not seem to cheer her.

"Just come down to the bay and go out with me," urged Cora. "I want to try the boat with the new control, and I don't want to go out alone!"

"Of course I will go with you," assented Freda. "I have only to change my blouse."

The motor trip was delightful. The *Chelton* seemed to have missed the guiding hand of its fair owner, for while the new piece of mechanism

was being put in Cora had not been using the boat.

"How different from the one we rode in this morning," Freda remarked. "I always feel as if something were going to explode when I sit near a noise such as that old engine made. I wonder that a big house like the Laurel can keep such a tub."

"Guests are always glad to get on the water," answered Cora, "and I suppose they are not particular as long as they do not have to pay extra for the sail. Most of the hotels down here hire out their launches, I believe."

They headed straight for the island, and then ran around it to come back on the east shore. In many of the passing boats were young friends of Cora, and all sorts of messages were shouted back and forth.

"I guess I had better go in early," Cora remarked, "as we really have not decided on this evening's plans. Some want the hop and others want the sail."

"And I have a lot to do, too," Freda said. "Mother and I have to take so much time from what we would like to do for you girls."

Cora protested against this, of course, declaring that the girls never had such help before, and regretting that Freda should take the matter so seriously.

"I cannot get over the attempt to rob Denny," Cora went on, as they neared the bungalow. "I am glad they chose a time when he was not around, for he would certainly fight. He thinks he has the same strength he enjoyed years ago, and I hate to think what might have happened had he met those fellows."

"Wasn't it awful?" commented Freda. "And to think that it must have been on our account, for I am convinced that those men were searching for papers they believe Denny has."

"No doubt about it," said Cora. "But he has none; has he?"

"He has never mentioned such a thing, and with us worrying as we are, I am sure that if he had any of our papers he would show them to mother. I know my grandfather trusted him more than he even trusted my father, his own son; but that is easy to understand, for Denny had settled for life here, near the property, while father was likely to go to any part of the world, had he lived. He always wanted to travel."

"This is a splendid afternoon to write letters," Cora remarked, "and I owe a very long one to mother. That, at least, I will get off on the last mail."

"I have some to write, too," Freda rejoined. "I had that very task in mind. I have to write to those 'in-laws' I interviewed last week. They

will think I am very ungrateful not to have written since my return. So long," she called out cheerily. "I hope when mother comes back we will all have cause to rejoice. That friend of father's is a very good lawyer."

"But he may not be able to say much until he has had a chance to look into the case," said prudent Cora. "We must not expect results so soon."

"Oh, I do," persisted Freda. "I know when he hears all that mother has to tell him he will be able to say something quite definite."

So the girls parted, Cora to go to her letter writing, and Freda to hers. It seemed the entire household at the Mote was very busy that afternoon, some resting for the evening, others arranging the fussy trifles so important to young girls.

It was getting dark when Freda came out at the side porch and looked anxiously down the road.

"Mother should have come on that train," she told herself. Then she waited to hear the train pass at the second crossing. "She would be on her way up now if she came," Freda reflected, "I'll get my things on and go to meet her."

Coming down the stairs she called Cora, but receiving no reply she did not wait to find her.

She expected to be gone only a few minutes and it was not worth while to wait to tell Cora where she was going.

The dusk came down quickly. Even as Freda passed under the big elm tree she could not see the moss at its trunk.

She hastened on, and was almost startled into a scream as she heard a noise. It was but the tinkle of a bell.

"Someone on a bicycle!" exclaimed Freda, in relief.

The bell tinkled again, and through an opening in the trees she caught a glimpse of the messenger boy from the railroad station. He saw her and called:

"A message for you!"

"A message for me?" she repeated in surprise. "Who can it be from?" At once she thought of her mother.

"I don't know," answered the lad. "Mr. Burke, at the station, took it over the telephone, and wrote it out. Here it is," and he held up an envelope. "It's all paid, and you don't have to sign the book; it isn't a regular telegram."

With trembling fingers Freda tore open the envelope. There was a single slip of paper inside and on it was written in the hand of the station agent:

"If you would do your mother a service come to Wickford Junction at once."

"Wickford Junction!" gasped Freda, as the messenger boy rode away. "Why, how did mother get there? That's in the opposite direction from Lamberton. Oh, there must have been some accident, and she has been taken there! I must go to her!"

Hastily Freda looked in her purse. She had barely money enough for the ticket, but she would go. On eager and anxious feet she sped toward the railroad depot. It was getting much darker.

"Oh, Mr. Burke!" Freda gasped, when she saw the agent behind his little wicket gate, "I've got to go to Wickford Junction. Mother is there."

"She is, Freda? Why I sold her a ticket to Lamberton this morning."

"I know. But there must have been some accident. I just got a message from Wickford Junction."

"I know, for I wrote it down. The person wouldn't give any name, but I'm sure it wasn't your mother."

"No, it couldn't have been! She's hurt!"

"Hurt?"

"Well, of course I'm not sure, but I fear she is. She must have told someone to send it. I've got to go. How much is a ticket?"

"Eighty-five cents. The train's due now. There she comes," he added, as a distant whistle sounded.

Freda had barely time to get her ticket and hurry aboard.

"Don't worry," the agent called out to her. "There hasn't been any accident, or I'd have heard of it."

But Freda did worry. All the way in the train she was a prey to nervous fears, and when the Junction was finally reached she was hardly able to keep up.

But there was no sign of an accident, and her mother was not there when she alighted—the only passenger to get off.

Wickford Junction was hardly more than a flag station, and there was an agent there only part of the time. He was not there now, but in the dingy waiting room, where Freda went to make inquiries, she found a shabbily dressed woman.

"Are you Freda Lewis?" the latter asked, starting forward.

"Yes, I am. But how did you know? Where is my mother? Did you send me a message? Oh, tell me quickly, please!"

"Now, dearie, don't get excited," soothed the woman in accents that only made Freda worry more. "It will be all right. I sent for you to

come here because I wanted to have a chance to talk to you alone. Now if you'll sit down——”

“What do you mean?” asked Freda, quickly. “I don't know you. What do you want?”

“Just to have a little talk with you. I thought it better to take this means than to go to your house. Sit down. You and your mother are trying to establish a claim to some property; aren't you?”

“Yes, that is well known. But what do you——”

“Never mind about that. I will tell you all in due time. Have you any papers to prove your claim?”

“Any papers?” asked Freda, suspiciously.

“Yes—deeds, mortgages or the like. I have studied law, and I may be able to help you. I have had experience in many disputed claims.”

“We don't know where——” Freda was about to say that they did not know where the papers were, when she thought better of it. Was it right to confide thus in a stranger?

“Now, dearie, tell me everything,” said the woman. “You can trust me. Or, better still, if you will come with me to the country hotel where I am stopping we will not be disturbed. Better come with me,” and in her eagerness she caught Freda by the arm.

“No, no! I'll not go!” gasped the girl. “I

want to find my mother. Who are you, and why do you ask me these questions? Did you send me that false message? What was your purpose in so deceiving me?"

"I did not deceive you!" replied the woman, sharply. "It was for the good of your mother that I asked you to meet me here. I will explain all to you later, but not here. I can do you good. Only trust me. Come with me. I have a carriage waiting outside."

Again she caught Freda's arm.

Then the harassed and nervous girl burst into tears. A kindly-faced hack driver, waiting outside in the hope of having some belated traveler hire him, heard. Dick Bently was a benevolent sort of chap, with daughters of his own. Hearing a girl crying he went into the depot.

"What's the matter, Miss?" he asked, and his tone was reassuring.

"Oh, it's my mother!" gasped Freda. "She isn't here, and this—this person sent me a message——"

"It was for your good, my dear," interrupted the strange woman, with an evil smile. "I'm trying to settle that property matter for you, my dearie!"

"Who are you, anyhow?" asked Dick belligerently. He did not like the appearance of the woman, nor her tone.

"It is not necessary for me to tell you anything," she replied, with assumed dignity. "If I am not wanted, I will go."

"Maybe it would be better," said the hackman. "Now, can I help you, young lady?" he asked kindly, as the woman hurried off.

"I only want to go home to Crystal Bay, and to my mother," said Freda, and she briefly explained the circumstances.

"Well, it's too bad, but I'm afraid you can't get back to Crystal Bay to-night," declared the hackman. "The last train has gone."

"The last train gone!" gasped Freda. "Oh, what am I to do?"

"Now don't you worry a mite," replied Dick. "I'll just take you home to my wife, and she'll look after you. Don't you worry," and, after some persuasion he prevailed on Freda to go in his ramshackle rig to his home, where she was kindly received by his wife.

"I'll go back to the station to meet the express that sometimes stops at the Junction," explained Dick, "and, Miss, if there come any inquiries for you I'll tell where you are. But you'll have to stay with us till mornin', I reckon."

Freda's mind was easier now, but she could not imagine what had been the object of the strange woman, nor why she had sent the telegram.

Meanwhile, back in the bungalow, there was

much alarm when Freda was missed. And when her mother came home safely, and found her daughter gone, she almost collapsed.

"Where can she have gone?" she wailed.

Hasty inquiries were made, and one of the boatmen told of having seen Freda start out through the woods, and meet the station messenger boy. After that it was easy to trace her.

Mr. Burke told of the 'phone message, and of having seen Freda board the train for the Junction.

And then a new difficulty arose. There was no train to the Junction that night; but Mrs. Lewis was in such a state that nothing short of a visit to the place would satisfy her. There was no telephone available then, the Junction station being closed.

Cora solved the trouble.

"We can go to Hartford in our boat," she said, "and from there it is only a short trip to the Junction. We could hire an auto."

This was done. In the *Chelton*, the motor girls and the boys went to Hartford, making good time in getting there. A neighbor came over to the bungalow to stay with Mrs. Lewis, who grew more alarmed as the night deepened.

The trip by auto, which was taken only by Jack, Cora and the chauffeur, was marked by the mishap of a blown-out tire, but that was all. When the

Junction was finally reached, there, true to his promise, was the hackman, and to Cora's excited inquiries he gave reassuring answers.

Yes, Freda was all right, and safe at his house. He directed Jack and Cora there, and soon all were reunited. Then explanations were offered, Freda's fears about her mother were quieted, and the trip back to Hartford made, where the motor boat party was anxiously waiting.

"And now for the bungalow!" sighed Cora, as she took her place at the familiar wheel. A little later it was reached, and mother and daughter were together again telling their stories, and speculating much about Freda's strange message and the mysterious woman. But the puzzle could not be solved.

CHAPTER XVI

A BAD CASE OF NERVES

"WOULD the boys have anything in their camp, do you suppose?" asked Bess, with a long sigh.

"Anything for what?" asked Lottie, as she looked surreptitiously into the mirror of her vanity box. Lottie was always worried about the effect of late hours.

"Is it something to eat?" asked Marita in her timid way. "If you want that, Bess, I'll go over and help you carry it."

"Gracious, I hope we don't need anything in the food line," said Cora. "I thought we stocked up with enough to last the rest of the week."

"I want something for my nerves," went on Bess. "They're on the ragged edge, and I jump at every sound."

"And no wonder," agreed Belle, as she went over to a hammock suspended between two trees. "Get something for mine, while you're at it, Bess. I think they use bromide, or something like that. But I doubt if the boys would have any. They don't seem to have a nerve in their bodies, though

goodness knows they're 'nervy' enough at other times. Pardon the colloquialism," she murmured as she sank back.

It was the morning after Freda's return, and the night had been rather a troubled one. No one in the girls' camp felt much like eating breakfast, though they managed to nibble at a bit of toast and drink some coffee.

The alarm about Freda had given the motor girls the keenest anxiety, and while Jack and the boys tried to make Freda and the girls believe the woman and the telephone message had been a joke, it looked to be too serious a matter to be lightly passed off.

The odd woman who had met Freda at the country junction had shown, by her questions, that she knew much about the disputed property. And her manner had been, in a way, rather threatening. It was too unusual to have been accidental, at any rate.

But Freda had reached home in safety. The motor girls were glad of that, but they were all suffering from a bad case of nerves, though, so far, Bess and Belle had been the only ones to admit it openly.

"I wouldn't take any of that bromide, if I were you, Bess," said Cora, as she straightened out some of the things in the living room. The usually homelike apartment had taken on a most

woebegone appearance since the previous night. Everyone had left everything just where she had happened to let it fall.

"But I've got to do something!" declared the plump twin. "My hand shakes—see, I can't hold it still," and in proof she held it out.

"It does shake," spoke Marita, in an awed whisper. "Maybe she had better have a doctor."

"Doctor! Nonsense!" laughed Belle. "Her hand trembles because she had her arm up so long this morning, trying to do her hair up that new way. Sit down, Bess, and you'll be all right in a few minutes."

"But I can't sit still, that's the trouble. I'm so nervous!" and Bess hastily arose from a chair in which she had seated herself, and began pacing up and down the broad bungalow porch.

"I have an idea!" exclaimed Cora.

"Don't let it die of lonesomeness," suggested Belle, with a laugh. "Think up another and have a pair of ideas."

"I will," replied Cora, promptly. "I think if we go out for a little spin in the boat it will do us all good. It's a lovely day—too lovely to let our nerves get the best of us. What do you say?"

"I'll do anything rather than sit here and think of what might have happened," sighed Bess.

"Oh, you're taking it entirely too seriously," put in Lottie, as she used a buffer on her already

pink and polished nails. "What could have happened?"

"Why, they might have taken Freda away!"

"Who would?"

"Those persons—men or women—or both—who are trying to get possession of the Lewis property. And, in a way, we might have been involved," went on Bess.

"I don't see how," observed Cora.

"Why, we've given advice to Freda and her mother, and if things went wrong some persons might say we had an object in it."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Belle. "You've surely got a case of nerves, all right. Come on, let's do as Cora says and take a trip on the water." She got out of the hammock—Belle could accomplish this difficult feat more gracefully than anyone else, Cora always said.

Then they all went down to the little dock where the *Chelton* was tied, and Cora, with a quickness born of long experience, ascertained that there was plenty of gasoline and oil in the craft. She tested the vibrator and found the current good, though at times, when not suffering from a fit of stubbornness, the engine had been known to start with the magneto. But it was not safe to depend on it.

"Are you all ready?" asked Cora.

"I guess so," answered Bess. "I guess I won't

have to have bromide, after all. I feel better already."

"I thought you would," laughed Cora. "Marita, just straighten out that stern flag, will you? Thank you. You're a dear!"

"Look out!" laughed Belle. "When Cora begins calling names there is no telling when she will stop."

"Don't worry," was Cora's answer, as she stooped over to crank the motor. It started on the first turn and soon the *Chelton* was chugging a course over the sun-lit waters of Crystal Bay.

"Do you see anything of the boys?" asked Cora, as she turned to the others from her place at the steering wheel.

"No, there's their boat—at least Jack's apology for one—tied to the stake," said Lottie. "Does that boat ever go out two days in succession, Cora?"

"I don't believe it does," answered Jack's sister. "It was a sort of makeshift, anyhow. Jack only got her running because someone said it couldn't be done—it was a sort of dare. But the poor old boat seems to suffer from some intermittent fever. It runs one day and rests the next."

"And the *Dixie*—she's resting, too," went on Bess, as she looked down the bay to where Dray Ward's fine racing craft was moored. "The boys are not around yet."

"Probably sleeping," murmured Belle. "The indolent creatures!"

"Folks who live in glass houses—and all the rest of it," said Cora. "It's nearly eleven, and we haven't been long away from the breakfast table ourselves."

"It's a case of carrying coals to Newcastle; isn't it?" asked Lottie, drying with her filmy handkerchief a drop of water on her dress.

"You mean the pot calling the kettle black," laughed Cora. Lottie never could get her proverbs just right.

"Oh, well, it's all the same as long as there's black in it," responded Lottie. "I knew I had part of it right."

On went the *Chelton*, and she had that part of the bay all to herself for the time being. A little breeze ruffled the water, and the sun shone brightly. Under these calming influences of nature the girls—even nervous Bess—felt themselves growing calm, and at peace with the world. The trouble of the night before seemed to melt away, and assume a less sinister aspect. But Cora could not get over the feeling that something akin to a tragedy had nearly happened.

"And it may again," she thought. "I do wish we could help Freda and her mother, but I don't see how. Land troubles are always so complicated."

As Cora turned the wheel and swung the boat about in a wide circle, she was aware of another craft coming toward her. She did not remember having seen it before, and as it drew nearer she noted that it contained but a single occupant—a young man, who, as Lottie said afterward, was not at all bad-looking.

The young fellow guided his boat closer to the *Chelton*, and after she had done making mental notes of the new craft's characteristics, Cora had an idea that the stranger wanted to speak to them. Such evidently was his intention, for he slowed down his engine, so as to muffle the noise of the exhaust, and called out:

"On which point is Bayhead, if you please?"

"Over there," answered Cora, pointing to a promontory that jutted out into the bay. "But be careful and go well out when you round it. There are some dangerous rocks at low tide. How much do you draw?"

"Thirty-four inches."

"That's too much to try the short cut."

"Thank you for telling me," went on the young man. He certainly was good-looking. Even Cora, conservative as she always was, had to admit that.

"We are going over that way," went on Cora. "If you like, I will pilot you."

"You are very good," returned the young man.

"If it will not be too much trouble, and not take you out of your way, I would like very much to have you show me the course. I'm a stranger here."

Cora and the motor girls had been on so many trips on land and water that they had learned how to meet and accept the advances of strangers, even when they were good-looking young men. There was, too, a sort of comradeship about a motor boat that lent a chaperonage to the effect of girls talking to men to whom they had never been introduced. Cora's chums realized this and thought nothing of her offer.

"Follow me," Cora called, as she opened the throttle a little wider, and the *Chelton* shot ahead. The other boat came right after, with a promptness that caused Cora to think it had more speed than she at first suspected.

"My nerves are much better—now," said Bess in a whisper to Lottie, as she stole a surreptitious glance at the young man.

CHAPTER XVII

A LITTLE RACE

FOR some time Cora held the lead in her boat, with the other following in her wake. The girls talked among themselves, speculation being rife as to what the young man wanted in Bayhead.

"It's an awfully swell place," said Lottie. "I spent one Summer there, and it was nothing but dress, dress, dress all the while! Either for motor-ing, tennis or bridge. Oh, I got so weary of it!"

"But you liked it—especially the dressing," put in Belle.

"I should have, my dear, I don't mind admitting that, if only I had had enough gowns," went on Lottie, with a sigh. "But I didn't have half enough. Papa was dreadfully poor that year. I believe he said there had been a 'slump in the market,' whatever that means.

"Anyhow I know I couldn't begin to dress as those in my set did. So that's how I remember Bayhead. I should like to go there again. It's perfectly stunning."

"That young fellow doesn't look to be any too well dressed," remarked Bess.

"Naturally he wouldn't—going out in a boat," said Cora. "Something seems to be the matter with his engine," she added, for the stranger was bending over it.

Whatever it was did not seem to be serious, for the lone motorboatist straightened up again presently. He increased his speed, and came alongside the *Chelton*.

"We seem to be some distance from the point," he said, with a smile. "Don't you want a little race? You can call it off before we get near the danger spot."

Cora was rather taken aback by the proposal. It was one thing to direct a stranger, even when he was a youth good to look at, and it was all right, too, to even pilot him on his way in strange waters; but it was quite another matter to have the aforesaid stranger invite himself to a race. It was like having a beggar apply at your front door, and when given a sandwich, calmly ask for soup.

"I don't believe——" began Cora, but Bess slid up to her on the long seat and whispered:

"Oh, do, Cora! It won't do any harm, and it will complete the nerve cure you have begun so well. Besides, we need a little practice in racing. We may take part in the water carnival down here."

"Well, if the rest of you are willing, I'm not going to be the one to object," returned Cora, smilingly.

"Will—will it be dangerous?" faltered timid Marita.

"Not a bit—you dear little goose!" exclaimed Belle, putting her arm about the shrinking one. "We've raced lots of times—and won, too!"

"Against such appealing strangers?" asked Lottie, raising her eyebrows in a rather affected way.

"Oh, it's all in the game!" laughed Bess. Certainly her nerves seemed all right now.

The young man—he had refrained from giving his name, either by accident or design—had been bending over his motor during the whispered talk among the girls. Now he looked up again.

"Well," he asked, pleasantly, "is it to be a race?"

"If you like," answered Cora, calmly.

"I certainly do like. I'm going to enter some of the Bayhead races, and I'd like to see how my boat will go."

"But it's a lighter boat than ours," returned Cora, who was not willing to give nor take an unfair advantage. "And we have five passengers."

"I've thought of that," the young man went on. "I'm willing to accept a handicap. I'll drop back

about five hundred feet and allow you that much."

"That would be fair," assented Cora, who, from having taken part in various races knew what would be about right.

"Then here goes!" cried the stranger, as he throttled down his motor. "I'll give you a hail when I'm coming on."

The *Chelton* at once began drawing away from the *Pickrel*, which was the name of the stranger's boat.

This craft, it seemed, had a clutch arrangement, so that the motor could be allowed to run without the propeller revolving. Cora's boat was likewise equipped.

"Are you going to beat him?" asked Lottie, as she moved back where no drop of spray could spot her blue dress.

"I am certainly going to try," said Cora with a smile. "What does a race amount to if you don't try to win?"

"Oh, of course, but then I thought this was only in fun."

"It's a race for keeps," announced Cora. "And I think we'll win. That last gasoline we got is the best we ever had. It gives us more power, and the *Chelton* is running like a sewing machine, as Jack says. I think we're going to win!"

She opened the throttle a little wider and the *Chelton* responded instantly.

A moment later there came a hail from the rear.

"Distance enough! I'm coming!"

Cora glanced back.

"He certainly was generous," she said. "That's a good five hundred feet."

"He looks like a generous chap," murmured Lottie. She was again polishing her nails. Possibly she thought she might be introduced to the stranger, later on.

There was the sound of a louder exhaust from the boat astern. The young man evidently was going to try his best to win.

But Cora had no intention of letting him do so. She had shrewdly estimated the ability of his boat, as well as she could, though of course it was difficult in the case of a craft she had never before seen.

"Sit on the other side; will you, Lottie dear?" asked Cora, as, grasping the steering wheel with firmer fingers she looked at the course ahead of her.

"Oh, I'm so comfortable here," objected Lottie.

"I know, but the boat isn't trimmed properly, and she can't do her best unless she is."

"Like us girls," remarked Belle. "We, too, must be properly trimmed to do our best."

"Trimmed!" exclaimed Lottie. "I don't see any frills on the *Chelton*."

"You may later, if we win the race," said Bess.

"But what Cora means is that the boat isn't properly balanced. There is too much weight on the starboard side."

"Oh, then I'm on the starboard side," said Lottie.

"Yes, or on the right, according to the new navy rules," agreed Cora. "But, really, someone must shift."

"But if I go over there I'm afraid the spray will get on my dress," objected Lottie. "And it spots terribly, especially with salt water."

"I'll change over," said Marita. "I don't mind if my dress does get wet."

"You're a dear," sighed Lottie, as she settled back among the cushions.

"And you're a bit selfish," thought Cora.

The *Chelton*, now in better trim, skimmed over the bay. Behind her came the *Pickerel*. And, as Cora looked back she noted that the young man's craft was slowly overtaking her.

"He has more speed than I thought he had," she mused.

Foot by foot the young man urged his boat onward. Clearly he was not of that false chivalrous type that permits a lady to win whether she has the ability or not. To a really athletic girl, pitted against a man in an equal contest, nothing is more humiliating than to realize that her opponent is not putting forth all his powers. There are some

men who will never try too hard to win from a woman. This stranger was evidently not of that type, and Cora valued him accordingly.

"Can you get up any more speed?" asked Belle, anxiously.

"I've got a bit left," said Cora, as she opened the throttle a little wider. "And I think I'll need it," she added.

"He certainly is coming on," added Belle in a low voice. "Are we getting too near the rocks, Cora?"

"No, it's safe so far. But I think I'll go out a bit. I want to win this race."

CHAPTER XVIII

MORE SUSPICIONS

CORA KIMBALL well knew the capabilities of the *Chelton*. She had steered other motor craft in many races, and was aware, almost to a revolution, just how much speed was available in a boat of this kind. And while she did not know what the rival boat could do, she was too expert at water sports to use up her last reserve of speed.

So, even while she watched the other boat creep up on her, she did not open the throttle to its fullest extent, nor did she advance the timer, which controlled the spark, to the limit.

"I'm going to be in shape to spurt if I have to," reasoned Cora.

Foot by foot the other boat crept on.

"He's going to win!" exclaimed Bess, in disappointed tones.

"Don't be so sure," laughed Cora. "Remember, we have been in races before, and in many a seeming hopeless one we have come out ahead."

"You girls are just—wonderful!" breathed Marita, as she crouched on the seat she had taken.

"You don't know us yet," laughed Bess. "Wait until you see some of the things Cora can do."

"Don't believe her!" exclaimed Cora, turning for an instant to smile at the girl who always seemed to be effacing herself for others. Then as she saw the spray coming up against the bows, and dashing over Marita, she added:

"Oh, you poor child! Why didn't you say you were getting wet?"

"Oh, I don't mind," was the brave answer.

"But you must," insisted Cora. "Here, put this on," and from a forward locker she pulled an oilskin coat, flinging it back to Marita, as at that moment the boat yawed when a big wave hit the bows, necessitating a firm hand on the wheel.

"Oh, it's getting rough!" exclaimed Lottie, apprehensively.

"Put away your nail-buffer and hang on," advised Bess. "It may be rougher before it's calmer."

"I—I wish I hadn't come," mourned Lottie.

"You aren't going to be ill, I hope," said Cora, quickly.

"No, but my dress may be all spotted——"

"Here, take this," offered Marita.

"No, indeed, you keep that," said Cora, quickly. "There are more in the lockers. Belle, will you get them out? It is a bit rough out here."

They had gotten beyond the protection of the

arm of land that enclosed the bay, and with a strong tide running there were more waves than there had been at first.

But the girls did not mind, save perhaps Lottie, and her chief anxiety was for her dress. An oil-skin coat, however, averted this danger, and she settled back in her place.

Cora looked back at the oncoming boat of the young man. It was within ten feet of her now, and as she opened the throttle of the *Chelton* a trifle more, she tried to get a glimpse of the controlling mechanism of her rival's craft.

She stood up to do this, and, as she did so there came a slapping wave against the bow of her boat. Cora staggered at the wheel, and Lottie screamed.

"Be quiet!" commanded Cora. "It's all right."

"But we roll so!"

"There *is* a bit of a sea on," admitted Cora, calmly. "It will be over in a few minutes, though. I'll have to tell him we're close to the danger point, and will have to slow down."

Determining to end the race in good style, Cora opened up the throttle full, and advanced the spark to the limit. The *Chelton* responded with a sudden burst of speed that carried her some distance ahead of the rival craft.

But the young man was evidently not going to take his defeat easily. The louder exhaust from

his engine told that he, too, had put on more power.

But it was not enough, for as Cora raised her hand, in automobile-signal fashion, to warn her follower of an impending stop, the end of the impromptu race course was reached.

The girls had won.

"What is it?" called the young man as he stood up at his wheel.

"The rocks," answered Cora. "We can't race any more."

"We don't need to," he replied. "You won. I congratulate you!"

His tone was sincere, his manner courteous, but, as Cora looked into his boat, when it rushed up alongside her slowed-down craft, she noted that his throttle was still partly closed.

Instantly a suspicion came to her.

"He did not try to win!" was the suggestion that flashed to her mind. "He didn't try!"

For a moment her brain was in a whirl, and she had an idea that she ought to tell her chums what she had in mind. Then she decided to be cautious—to wait and watch a little longer. She wanted to find out his reason.

Who was this strange young man who seemed so friendly? What did he want in Bayhead? Why had he proposed a race? And then, after

proposing it, why had he not won it when, clearly, he might have done so?

These were the questions that Cora asked herself as she slowed down her motor.

She had used up her limit of power in an honest endeavor to win, but the young man had not. He had held back purposely.

Why had he done it?

CHAPTER XIX

ODD TALK

"SORRY I couldn't beat you!" called the young man, waving his hand to the girls in Cora's boat. "You had more speed than I thought."

"Are you sure it was a fair race?" asked Cora, looking at him sharply. Her tone was peculiar.

"A fair race? What do you mean?" he asked, wonderingly. "Do you think I should have given myself more of a handicap?"

"Oh, no indeed!" exclaimed Cora, blushing that he should have mistaken her meaning. "You were generous—too generous, I think."

"Oh, that's all right. I'm not complaining. Of course it was a fair race. The faster boat won."

"I'm glad you think so," spoke Cora, meaningly, as she thought of the partly-closed throttle.

"Oh, yes indeed. I'm satisfied!" he exclaimed in generous tones. "But is the dangerous place you spoke of near here?"

"Right ahead," answered Cora, pointing to where the water was swirling in over some partly-

hidden rocks. "Keep well out, and when you round the point you'll be at Bayhead."

"I'm greatly obliged to you," was his reply. But Cora did not look at him, nor return his bow. She swung her boat around and started back for the bungalow. The young man, with a curious glance at her, bent over his motor to make some adjustment. In another instant his craft shot ahead, seemingly at greater speed than it had made at any time during the race.

"I don't think much of him," observed Lottie, as she took a more comfortable position on the cushions.

"Why not?" Belle asked.

"Because he didn't even invite us to a tennis game, to say nothing of ice cream sodas, and there's a place in Bayhead where they have the most delicious chocolate!"

"Lottie!" gasped Marita. "Would you have gone with him?"

"Oh, well," with a shrug of her shoulders, "I don't know as I would, only—he might have asked us."

"No, he wouldn't," said Cora, and the manner in which she spoke caused her chums to look curiously at her.

"What makes you think so?" inquired Bess, merely for the sake of argument. She had stopped eating sweets—for the time being.

"Because he had a special object in view in asking us to race, and once that was accomplished he had no further use for us."

"Why, Cora Kimball!" cried Belle. "What makes you say that?"

"Because I think it. You didn't see all that I did."

"What did you see?" asked Bess, eagerly. "Did he have some sort of weapon? Or do you think he tried to get us over this way, hoping we would be wrecked on the rocks? Maybe he was a wrecker, Cora. I've heard that there are some of those terrible people in this section."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Cora. "I only mean that his boat is a very powerful one. He did not 'let her out,' as Jack says, to the limit. He could easily have beaten us if he had wanted to."

"The idea!" cried Belle. "I don't like that kind of young man."

"Nor I," agreed Cora. "Not because he refused to win when he could, but because of what may be his object. That he had one I'm certain."

The girls turned to look at the other motor boat. It was rounding the point to Bayhead now, and seemed to be going at remarkable speed.

"How fast it goes!" exclaimed Lottie.

"Yes, much faster than the *Chelton*," responded Cora. "I told you he was holding back."

"What could have been his object?" asked Belle.

And that was a question all the girls asked themselves.

"Well, my nerves are better, anyhow," observed Bess, as she threw back the clustering hair from her face so that the wind might caress her cheeks, now flushed with excitement.

"That's good," spoke Cora.

"The antidote of the race and the excitement of the mystery, as to why the nice young man didn't want to win, are guaranteed to cure nerves of money refunded," said Lottie with a laugh. "Where are you going, Cora?"

"Back to the bungalow, of course. Mrs. Lewis may be anxious about us. It is nearly lunch time, anyhow."

"Then it is time for us to be anxious about ourselves," said Bess. "But I don't believe Mrs. Lewis will worry. You know she went away right after doing up the breakfast things. She said she was going to consult some friends, for those she saw last night could not help her, and she may not be back yet. So there's no need to hurry."

"Then I have an idea!" cried Cora. "We have our tea outfit with us, and some crackers. Why not go ashore and have a little picnic? It will complete the nerve treatment, perhaps," and she smiled at Bess.

"Good!" cried that girl. "It will be just the thing. Are you sure you have enough crackers, Cora? If not we could stop at the store on the point and get some."

"Oh, there are more than are good for you," was the answer.

Cora changed the course of the boat to send the craft over toward a pretty little wooded cove where the girls had often gone ashore for luncheon. They always carried in the boat an alcohol stove, with the necessary ingredients for tea.

Soon the *Chelton* was beached at a place where the small waves would do her no damage, and the girls were preparing luncheon.

They carried their own fresh water with them, not depending on finding a spring. Condensed milk, sugar and some tins of sweet crackers completed the meal, which was served on the grass for a table, paper napkins adding to the luxury of the occasion.

The picnic place was on a spit of land that jutted out into Crystal Bay. It could be approached from either side, and on one side there was some dense shrubbery that hid the water from sight.

It was when Cora and her chums were in the midst of their impromptu luncheon that they heard

a boat grate on the beach that was hidden from view by the bushes.

"Someone is coming!" exclaimed Bess.

"Maybe it's the boys," remarked Belle.

"It's about time they followed us," suggested Lottie. "They don't give us a moment's peace."

"Do you want it?" asked Cora pointedly, for Lottie had been rather taken up with Jack, of late.

"Oh, I don't know," answered the girl. "Of course the boys are nice, and——"

"'Handsome is as handsome does,'" quoted Belle. "But that doesn't happen to be the boys."

"How do you know?" asked Bess.

"I just had a glimpse of them through the bushes. It's a strange motor boat—neither the *Dixie* nor the *Lassie*."

"Who is in her?" asked Cora.

"I can't make out. Listen!"

She raised her hand for silence, but there was no need. The girls ceased chatting at once, and silently followed Cora toward a hedge of underbrush, some little distance from where their luncheon was spread.

Then they heard some odd talk—at least it seemed odd until they understood the meaning of it.

"So you had a race with them?" one voice asked.

"Yes," replied another, who had just landed

on the spit of the land. " I raced 'em, but I didn't beat 'em! "

" Couldn't you? "

" Couldn't I? Say, you know what the *Pickarel* can do when she's pushed to it. I held back the throttle."

Cora started. Her suspicions were unexpectedly confirmed.

" You can see them from over here," whispered Belle, pulling Cora's sleeve. Cora moved to where an opening in the bushes afforded a glimpse of the strangers.

She saw three men, and one of them she knew in an instant to be the young chap who had raced with her. His boat, too, was on the beach. It was from her that the men had come.

" Well, you know how fast the *Chelton* can go now, that's sure," spoke a voice.

" Yes," answered the young man, " I know. We needn't fear her if it comes to a chase. That's what I wanted to make sure of."

" Then all we have to do is to get the rest of the evidence, and the property is ours."

" Yes. We can turn the widow and the daughter out, all right, if we get the necessary papers. Then we can go ahead and build the dam across the brook."

" That's going to arouse a lot of opposition! "

exclaimed the third member of the trio. "It will spoil the park."

"Well, we can't help it. We need the dam for power for our factory, and the people don't really need the park. We'll do it."

"You mean we'll make Shane do it!" exclaimed the young man who had raced with Cora.

CHAPTER XX

THE NIGHT PLOT

THE girls looked at one another with startled glances. Cora bent forward eagerly in order to better hear what else was said. She had no compunctions as to eavesdropping, feeling that it was justified under the circumstances.

"They must mean Denny Shane, the old fisherman," whispered Bess.

"Hush!" cautioned Cora. Not only did she want to listen, but she was fearful lest the men on the other side of the hedge discover the presence of herself and her chums.

"Yes," resumed the speaker, "we must make old Shane do it. Once we get him in the proper frame of mind he'll testify just as we want him to. And we need some testimony to offset that of the widow and her girl. Otherwise we'll never get the property without a long delay."

"But how can we get Shane in the proper frame of mind to testify as we want him to?" asked another of the trio.

"Leave that to me," answered the one who had been in the fast motor boat. And Cora started as she noted the difference in his tone now. It was hard and cruel, while, in speaking to her, his accents had been those of a cultured gentleman, used to polite society. There was a metallic ring to his voice now that boded no good to Denny Shane.

"Yes, I guess we'll leave it to you, Bruce," said a voice, "though maybe Kelly could put it over him with a bit of blarney. You know Shane is Irish."

"Hush! No names, and not so loud!" cautioned the one who had been addressed as Bruce.

"Who'd be listening?" asked the other.

"You never can tell, Moran," was the retort.

"There you go!" exclaimed Bruce, fretfully, and the girls knew it must have been the one called Kelly who spoke that time.

There was a movement on the other side of the bush, and Cora, with a sudden motion, crouched down, signalling the others to do the same. It was only just in time, too. Fortunately for the girls they were in a sort of depression, and by crouching down they got out of sight, as one of the men came forward to peer through the underbrush. He saw nothing, as was evidenced by his report a moment later.

"There's not a soul here," he said. "There's

been some picnic party around, but they've gone. It's as deserted as a graveyard."

"I'm glad we came away from our luncheon," whispered Cora, as the men resumed their talk. The wind sprang up, for a moment, and carried their tones away from the girls, so that only an indistinct murmur could be heard. Then there came clear talk again.

"Well, what's the program, then?" asked one whom the girls could tell was Moran. He was the same man they had seen before in the drug store.

"Get at Shane first of all," decided Kelly. "I'm willing to let Bruce do it, even if I am Irish."

"We'll all have to call on him," said Bruce, grimly, "but only one need actually do the business. We've got to deal with him in two ways. We've got to make him tell what we want brought out in court, and we've got to scare him so that he won't tell what we don't want known. And there are two ways of doing that."

"How?" asked Kelly.

"First we can offer him a reward. It will be worth it, even if we have to pay something to have him testify as we wish. The committee allowed us a certain sum for—well, let us say for witness fees. I'd rather pay him a hundred dollars and have it all over with. It's better to have a friend

than an enemy, and you never can tell which way a thing like this is going to swing."

"Sposin' he won't take the cash?" asked Moran.

"Then I have another plan," and Bruce laughed bitterly. "I guess I don't need to say what it is."

"I'm wise," remarked Kelly. "Only—not too rough, you understand. He's a feeble old man."

"No rougher than's necessary," agreed Bruce.

Cora clasped her hands, and looked with fear in her eyes at her chums.

"We—we mustn't let them harm dear old Denny!" whispered Belle, shivering with nervousness.

"Hush!" cautioned Cora. "Don't talk—think!"

There was a movement on the other side of the screen of bushes, as indicating that the men were about to leave.

"Well, we'll let it go until to-night then," said Kelly.

"Until to-night," agreed Bruce. "And we know, in case of a slip-up, that there's no motor boat around here that can catch us when we make our get-away."

"There's the *Dixie*," suggested Moran.

"She's out of commission, I heard," responded Bruce. "And she won't be in shape for a day or

so. The *Chelton*—well, I gave her a try-out a while ago, and I know what she can do.”

“Oh, do you?” thought Cora. “Perhaps you don’t.”

“I have to laugh when I think how I took those girls in,” went on Bruce. “I pretending that I was a stranger in these waters, and they kindly offering to pilot me. I guess they took me for some society swell of Bayhead.”

“The mean thing!” hissed Lottie.

“Well, you can do the society act when you have to,” said Kelly. “Only I guess we won’t need that now. Shane doesn’t move in society circles. How’d the game with the widow’s daughter work out?”

“It didn’t work at all. ‘Confidence Kate’ didn’t gain her confidence. That’s why I’m switching to Shane,” answered Bruce. “But we’d better be going. There’s lots to be done.”

Cora and the motor girls listened in silence as the men crunched their way down the beach to their boat.

A little later they were chugging away in the speedy *Pickarel*.

“Isn’t that just awful!” gasped Belle.

“It’s a villainous plot!” exclaimed Bess. “Oh, I’m so nervous! I know I’m going to cry—or laugh—or do both.”

“Bess Robinson, if you do anything foolish, or

faint, you shan't do a thing toward helping to save Denny Shane!" exclaimed Cora, vigorously. "And I know you do want to help him."

"I certainly do. I'll behave. Oh, let me have a cup of tea."

"I think we'll all be better for it," assented Cora. "Come, girls, let's eat and then we'll get back. We, too, have a great deal to do."

"Do you mean that you girls are going to try to—to outwit those desperate men?" asked Marita, her eyes opened wide.

"We certainly do mean to!" insisted Cora. "Who else would do it?"

"Why, the police."

"There are only constables in a place like this. We can do better than they—especially with the boys to help."

"Oh, of course, the boys!" agreed Marita, and she seemed relieved.

"I must say it was most providential that we heard what they said," spoke Lottie, looking to see if there were any grass stains on her dress.

"Indeed it was," assented Cora.

It was rather an excited little luncheon, but the hot tea did them all good, and then, rapidly talking over what they had just gone through, and making all sorts of plans to outwit the schemers, the girls got into their boat again, and headed for the bungalow.

"Of course we must warn Denny at once," said Cora, and to this the girls agreed. "Then we'll tell the boys, and see what they suggest. But I almost know what Jack will say!"

"What?" asked Lottie. She was very much interested in Jack.

"Oh, he'll want to hide and capture the villains 'red-handed,' as he calls it."

"And I don't know but what that's as good a plan as any," remarked Belle. "I'd like to see them do it!"

Cora and her chums found Mrs. Lewis rather worried over their absence from the bungalow. She had returned, unsuccessful, from seeing her friends. Freda was recovering from the shock and fright of the day before.

"Where have you been?" Mrs. Lewis asked Cora.

"Oh, just off on a little picnic," was the answer, and Cora motioned to her chums to say nothing of what they had heard. They had agreed that it would be better for the widow not to know, at least for the present.

"Dinner will be ready soon," suggested Mrs. Lewis.

"We'll have it a little late to-day," replied Cora. "We have had some tea, and I want to go over and see Jack. They haven't been around here since we left; have they?"

"Oh, yes," answered Freda. "They were all here, wanting to know where you'd gone; but of course I couldn't say. Then they went out in your brother's boat, but they didn't get far before they had a breakdown."

"It's the *Lassie's* day off again," laughed Belle.

"Why didn't they take the *Dixie*?" asked Bess.

"Something is the matter with her, too," replied Freda.

Cora and her chums exchanged meaning glances. The talk of the men was confirmed. Evidently they had their own way of getting information.

"Well, we'll go over to Camp Couldn't," suggested Cora, after a pause. "They're probably there now."

They found the boys grouped about, in and out of the tent.

"Here they come!"

"Where have you been, girls?"

"We've been lonesome for you!"

"How bright the day seems now, to what it was before!"

Thus chanted Jack, Walter, Ed and Dray Ward, as they saw the advancing girls.

"Oh, stop that nonsense, Jack!" exclaimed Cora, as her brother waltzed forward to do a two-step on the moss with timid Marita.

"Why, what is wrong?"

"Lots!" she exclaimed, and her manner must

have impressed Jack, for he grew grave at once.

"Has anything more happened since last night?" he asked.

"There has. We've discovered the meanest plot to harm Denny Shane. Listen."

"We list!" recited Walter, but Cora quieted him with a look.

Then began the telling of the overheard conversation.

"Well, what do you know about that?"

"The nerve of that chap wanting a race!"

"We'll race *him*, all right!"

"And so they're going to do up old Denny, eh?"

"Well, I guess we'll have a hand in that!"

These were the comments of Jack and his chums.

"Now don't do anything rash," begged Cora.

"We've got to do *something*," insisted Jack.

After some consultation it was agreed that the boys should go over and have a talk with the fisherman, and then, among themselves, they would decide on what was best to be done.

Meanwhile the girls would go back to the bungalow, there to await the report of the boys. Nothing would be said to Mrs. Lewis, for she had had alarm enough.

It was anxious waiting for the girls, and they were so nervous that they did not enjoy the dinner

Mrs. Lewis had prepared, at which lack of appetite she wondered much. But she ascribed their distraction, and their rather strange comments, to the alarm of the day before.

Finally the *Lassie*, which had somehow been induced to "mote," was descried coming across the bay from the direction of the old fisherman's cabin.

"Come on, girls!" called Cora as she saw the boys. "We'll go down and meet them." She did not want Mrs. Lewis to hear the talk.

"Well, Jack?" asked Cora, as the boat came in.

"Not well—bad," he said. "Denny wasn't at home, and no one knew where he had gone. So we left a note for him, and we'll be on hand to-night."

"What about us?" asked Bess.

"You'd better stay here," said Jack. "No telling what sort of a row we may run into, and you're better at home."

"I think so, too," agreed Cora, but the look she gave her chums had more meaning in it than the mere words indicated. Bess and the others understood.

"And now," went on Jack, "we'll proceed to find out why the *Dixie* won't mote. We want her in shape to-night."

"That's right," assented Dray. "I think it's the carbureter. I'll get a man from the garage to look it over."

"We'll want a fast boat if the one those fellows have is as speedy as you girls say," remarked Walter.

"Couldn't we take the *Chelton*?" asked Ed.

"The *Pickrel* beat us to-day," said Cora. "Besides, it might be good to have her in reserve. Try and have the *Dixie* fixed up."

"We will!" promised her owner.

The remainder of the day seemed like a dream to the girls. Never had time passed so slowly. They were waiting for what the night might bring.

The boys made several other trips to the fisherman's cabin, going afoot through the woods, as the *Lassie* had again gone on a strike, and a man from the garage was working over the *Dixie*.

The fisherman's cabin could be reached in two ways, but the water route was preferred by the young people, even though it was longer.

The boys could not find Denny at home, however, and planned to be at his cabin just at dusk, and to remain there until something happened.

"So we'll be sure to be there when the men arrive," said Jack.

Finally twilight came, and with the falling of night the repairs to the *Dixie* were completed. She seemed to be running better than in some time.

"Well, here we go!" remarked Walter, as the boys took their places in the swift craft. "We'll

let you girls know what happens—as soon as it happens.”

“You’d better!” laughed Cora. “We’ll be very anxious.”

She and her chums had come down to the dock to see the boys leave on their trip to save Denny from an unknown danger.

Then came more anxious waiting.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BREAKDOWN

"WELL, he hasn't come back yet."

"No. It's sort of queer, too. I wonder where he can be keeping himself, all day?"

"Maybe those fellows have got to him after all."

Jack Kimball and his chums, landing at the fisherman's dock from the *Dixie*, thus commented when they paid another visit to Denny's cabin, and found him still absent.

"No, I don't imagine anything has happened," said Jack. "You know he often goes off and stays a long time in his boat. He's got a crazy sort of motor in it, that runs about as often as the one does in the *Lassie*. He may be stuck somewhere."

"Or else waiting the turn of the tide," suggested Ed.

"That's right," chimed in Dray. "I've heard him say that certain fish won't bite when the tide's running out, and that you can catch others only when it's coming in. Maybe he is hanging around for that."

"Then he ought to be back soon," declared Jack, "for the tide turned a half-hour ago."

"If he's far out in the bay it will take him a long while to come in. His boat doesn't make very good time," observed Walter.

The boys walked around the cabin. It was closed and locked, and the warning note they had left for the fisherman was still pinned to the door.

"Which shows that those men haven't been here," said Jack. "That makes me fear that they may have gotten to him before us."

"Why so?" asked Ed.

"Well, it's evident that the men haven't been here since the girls gave us the alarm. If they had they'd have torn up that note. Then, too, you'd think, if they were going to try to make Denny do what they wanted in the way of giving testimony, they'd be getting at it. He goes to bed early, as everybody around here knows, and locks up. If those fellows wanted to get at him without breaking in they'd come early. All of which makes me think that they may already have had a serious interview with him."

"I hope not," observed Walter. "I'm more inclined to believe that he's out on the bay somewhere. If he is he's all right."

"Say, fellows, I've got an idea!" cried Jack.

"Hold fast to it—they're scarce," remarked Ed.

"No, but seriously. Suppose we cruise about a bit. We needn't go far from the shore, and we can have an eye on the cabin. In case Denny is out on the water we may pick him up. Then we could tell him what was on, and warn him. We could do it even better than on shore here, for there's no telling but what some of those fellows may be in hiding around here," and Jack cast a look about. It was dark, but a full moon was coming up to make a light that revealed most objects.

"Then if there is a possibility that someone may be in ambush here," said Walter, "we'd better keep a bit more mum. But I think Jack's plan is a good one. Let's cruise about a bit, but keep within sight of the cabin."

No one had any objections so, after making a casual search about the cabin, and not finding anyone in hiding, the boys again got aboard the *Dixie* and started to cruise on the bay, that was now sparkling in the moonlight.

Jack and his chums kept a careful watch for Denny Shane's boat. There were several motor craft out, for the night was one that invited trips on the water—calm and still, with a gentle breeze that had in it the tang of salt mingled with the sweet odors of Summer.

"I feel just like singing," remarked Ed, after a pause during which the *Dixie* cruised about, not too far from the cabin.

"Have some regard for our feelings," begged Jack. "Remember that we are under a great strain."

"And Ed would be, too, if he sang," said Walter. "At least I would feel constrained to remonstrate with him."

"Huh! Think no one can sing but yourself!" retorted Ed.

"Moonlight always did have a queer effect on him," remarked Jack.

Round about they cruised, and they were thinking of returning to make sure that Denny had not reached his cabin by some other route, unseen by them, when the motor of the *Dixie* gave a combined cough, groan and sneeze, and stopped short.

"There she goes!" exclaimed Ed.

"You mean there she *doesn't* go!" corrected Walter.

"Get the talcum powder," suggested Jack.

"I'm sure Dray didn't use the tooth brush on her before we came out," spoke Jack, accusingly.

The boys had a way of doing the most absurd things, from a mechanical standpoint, whenever their motors refused to mote. They would dust talcum powder on the cylinder tops, or tie a piece of baby-blue ribbon on the pet-cock when they had exhausted every other means of making a rebellious motor operate.

And the odd part of it was that, often, when

they had done these seemingly silly things, the boat would start. So they were rather superstitious about it, and they did carry a tin of talcum powder with them, much to the amusement of the girls.

In turn the usual sources of trouble were looked for and eliminated one after the other.

No wires seemed to have broken, the current was good, the vibrator buzzed when the contact was made and there was plenty of gasoline in the tank.

"Put in a new spark plug," suggested Jack.

"New ones went in to-day," answered Dray.

"They can't have sooted already. It isn't there."

"Give her a little more air," proposed Walter.

"I think she's getting too rich a gasoline mixture."

"I'm not going to touch the carbureter!" declared the young owner of the *Dixie*. "It was trouble enough to get her fixed before. Hand me that talcum." Gravely he dusted some on the pump rod.

Then another attempt was made to start the motor, but it only sighed dismally, and refused to do its duty.

"I say!" cried Jack, looking up from where he had been examining the carbureter with an electrical pocket flash, "we're drifting out to sea!"

"So we are!" agreed Ed. "Say, can't you get her going?"

"Can't seem to," replied Drayton. "I'll sell

this boat and get another as soon as I can. She's a nuisance!"

"Well, we sure are broken down," sighed Jack, "and how we are going to get back to the cabin is more than I can figure out."

"Let's whistle for help," suggested Walter.

"Look!" exclaimed Jack, pointing in the direction of shore. "There's a light in Denny's cabin!"

They all looked, and saw a flickering gleam of fire near the shack that had been deserted all day.

"Something's doing!" cried Ed. "And we're stuck out here!"

CHAPTER XXII

AT THE CABIN

"GIRLS," declared Cora Kimball, "I can't stand it any longer! I've got to do something—or have nervous prostration."

"And that's just the way I feel!" said Bess. "Waiting is the most nervous thing in the world."

"Have another chocolate," suggested Lottie, helping herself from the box on a table near her.

"How dare you suggest such a thing?" demanded Bess. "As if I wasn't trying to do all I could to reduce."

"Oh, well, I was thinking of your nerves," observed Lottie.

"But what is it you want to do, Cora, dear?" asked Marita.

"I want to go to Denny's cabin, and see what has happened," was the answer.

"What!" cried Belle, with an exclamation of surprise and alarm. "Tramp through the woods at this hour of night?"

"It isn't any such great, or late, hour of night,"

replied Cora, calmly, "and the woods are not dark. There's a lovely moon. But I don't propose to go through the woods. What is the *Chelton* for if we can't use her?"

"Cora Kimball, do you mean to say that you'd go out on the bay, and over to Denny's cabin, after dark, with the prospect that some desperate men are going to attack him?" asked Bess.

"The boys are going to be there," answered Cora, still refusing to become excited. "Besides, they may need our help. We could take a prisoner or two in our boat."

There was a chorus of screams.

"Cora Kimball—how dare you?" demanded Belle.

"Oh, I meant if he was tied hand and foot," went on the leader of the motor girls. "Villains are always tied hand and foot, you know. They can't move. They're gagged, too. I think I should insist on having our villain gagged. It might happen to be that young man who raced with us to-day, and he might get sarcastic if he could talk. Yes, I think he must be gagged."

"Oh, Cora, you're hopeless," sighed Lottie. "What would my mother say if she could see me now."

"She'd tell you to stop eating chocolates and come with me," returned Cora, firmly. "I'm going to the cabin."

"I—I'll go with you," volunteered Marita, and then she blushed at the attention she attracted.

"Well, if Marita isn't afraid to go, I'm not," announced Lottie, with spirit. "Come on, Cora."

"Oh!" gasped Bess.

"Oh, dear!" echoed Belle. "Do we have to stay here all alone?"

"Either that, or come with us," invited Cora. "I'm going over to the cabin in our boat."

There was a step at the door of the living room, and Mrs. Lewis looked in.

"Did I hear you girls say you were going out?" she inquired.

"Just for a little trip on the water," replied Cora, signing to her chums to keep silent. "It is so lovely with the moon, and we won't go far."

It was not a great way to Denny's cabin.

"Well, don't be gone too long," cautioned the widow. "You must remember that I am, in a way, responsible for you girls."

"Oh, we'll be careful," Cora promised. "We'd take Freda with us, but perhaps she had better stay with you."

"Yes, I think so. Besides, she is so nervous after what nearly happened last night, that I'd rather she wouldn't go out. Oh, if only things were settled! If only we were sure we could get that property back, and not have to worry about it being taken away from us!"

"Have they been annoying you of late?" asked Cora, thinking perhaps there had been some developments of which she was unaware.

"No, nothing special, since that horrid woman. But it is a constant worry to me."

"It must be," returned Cora, sympathetically. "Well, we will hope for the best."

Cora did not say so—even to her chums, but she had great hopes that something might develop from the events of this night. If the unscrupulous men could only be caught in some wrong-doing a hold might be obtained over them that would enable them to be defeated in court. Thus their claim to the property—which claim Cora felt sure was a false one—might be disproved.

That there were papers in existence which would show the widow and her daughter to be the rightful owners Cora did not doubt. Freda's grandfather, from all accounts, was a careful business man, if eccentric in some ways. He would not have come into possession of property without having the papers to prove his claim. And he was not a man to put them in some safe deposit vault and leave no memorandum as to finding the key.

Perhaps they were concealed in some nook or cranny in the widow's home. Cora made up her mind to have a search made after this night was over.

Then, too, Denny might be able to come upon

them. Eccentric in some ways, as Freda's grandfather had been, he might have hidden the papers in Denny's cabin.

That was a new thought. Perhaps the scheming men knew this, and that is why they wanted to attack the old fisherman.

"We simply must go to his cabin," decided Cora, "and find out what has happened. I can't wait any longer."

Wraps were quickly donned, and down to the dock went the girls. The *Chelton* was in running order, and soon they were out on the moonlit waters of the bay.

"There's a light in his cabin," said Cora, as they came out from behind a point, and had a view of the little cove where nestled Denny's cottage.

"I hope the boys are there," remarked Bess, "and that they have the villains all tied up and ready for delivery."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Belle. "If they have I wish they'd send them by parcel post instead of asking us to take charge of them."

"They'll be harmless," guaranteed Cora. "Besides, the *Dixie* can't hold more than the boys; our boat is larger."

"We could let the boys run this one, after the men are tied in her," suggested Lottie, "and we could come home in the *Dixie*."

"Never!" exclaimed Cora. "You can't rely on her. I'll stick to the *Chelton*."

But if the girls had only known that, at that moment, far out on Crystal Bay, was the ill-fated *Dixie*, drifting to sea, while the boys tooted hopelessly for aid on the compressed air whistles!

The *Chelton* made a quick and uneventful trip to the fisherman's cabin. From it a light peacefully glowed.

"There's no one here," announced Bess. "Not even the boys."

"Be careful," warned Cora. "It may be a trap. Let us go up softly."

"But what about those men?" asked Belle. "Maybe they have taken Denny away with them, and the boys, too."

"Don't be silly," advised Cora. "Let's go up and look in."

As they peered in the cabin window they saw Denny seated in an easy chair. He was alone, and across his knees was the red oar of which he seemed so fond.

CHAPTER XXIII

UNEXPECTED HELP

"WELL, we certainly are up against it—good and proper!" exclaimed Jack. "And I'm glad the girls aren't along!"

"Why?" asked Walter, leaning back against the gunwhale to rest after laboring over the refractory engine of the *Dixie*.

"Because they can't call me down for my slang. And believe muh—as the telephone girls say—I can use slang now and then—some!"

"It is aggravating; isn't it?" asked Dray.

"Aggravating, my dear chap, is hardly the word," drawled Ed. "It's humiliating!"

He brought that out in such a droll way that the others laughed.

For the engine of the motor boat still refused to be coaxed into going. They were being carried out toward the mouth of the bay on the outgoing tide, which was now running strongly. Soon they would be out to sea, and though the moon still shone brightly there was a haze in the sky that betokened a coming storm.

But it was not so much the fact of the stalled engine, nor that they were being carried out to sea, and were in some danger, that worried the boys.

"We're falling down on what we said we'd do," declared Jack. "We promised the girls that we'd save Denny from those fellows, and we can't do it. They may be at him now."

"We certainly saw a light at his cabin," ventured Ed.

"But we can't see it now," added Jack, straining his eyes for a glimpse of the spot where the fisherman's shack stood.

"Well, there's no use worrying over what can't be helped," observed Walter, philosophically. "We're here and not there. Denny will have to look out for himself—I guess he's able."

"That isn't the point," rejoined Jack. "There we took the case out of the girls' hands, so to speak. We said we were the big noise, and that we'd look after things. Then we go and get stuck miles from shore where we can't do a thing. They'll laugh at us when we do get back, if they don't do any worse."

"But we didn't know we were going to get stuck when we came out for a little run, after we found Denny wasn't home," said Dray.

"That's no excuse," returned Jack. "It's like a child breaking the looking glass and then saying he didn't mean to. Well, I know one thing Cora

will say when we get back—if we ever do—and own up that we weren't on hand when the play came off."

"What will she say?" asked Dray. He was not well acquainted with the doings and sayings of the motor girls, as yet.

"She'll say that she and Bess and Belle and the rest of them could have done better themselves, if we'd left it to them. And I guess she'd be more than half right," sighed Jack.

"Well, there's no use crying over a bridge before you come to it," observed Dray. "Let's have another go at that engine."

They began their labors all over again. They even took out the spark plugs, though they had been new that afternoon.

Nothing could be found wrong there. The feed pipe from the gasoline tank was examined, but it seemed to provide a good flow. The timer was adjusted and readjusted. The coil was looked to. Everything, in short, that the boys could think of, or that previous trouble had taught them to look for, was tried, and all with no effect.

They even did more absurd things, such as the talcum powder act, while Jack spouted some Latin verses at the forward cylinder. But the motor refused to mote.

"And, all the while, we're going out to sea," remarked Walter.

"Out to sea to see what we can see," said Jack.

"Oh, hush-a-bye-baby on the jokes," exclaimed Dray, a bit petulantly. "If ever I buy a speed boat again you'll know it! A good old-fashioned make-and-break motor for mine after this—one you can depend on."

"Haven't you an oar or a paddle?" asked Ed.

"Not a thing that we could use to work against the tide," answered Dray, gloomily. "There's a boat hook, but that isn't any better than a straw. I left the oars out after the man got through fixing the motor to-day. He said I wouldn't need them."

"The regard that individual has for the truth is something scandalous!" said Walter, grimly. "I shall acquaint him with the fact on my return."

"When we *do* return," returned Jack, gloomily.

"Oh, we're bound to be picked up—sooner or later," declared Walter.

"Mostly later," went on Jack, more gloomily.

"Well, here goes for another try," said Dray.

"That's right. Maybe the machine has just been giving us a try-out," suggested Ed. "We certainly have said mean things about you, old Mote!" he went on sarcastically. "Kindly forgive us and go. 'See by moonlight 'tis 'most midnight, time boat and us were home hour-and-a-half ago,'" he said, quoting from the old nursery rhyme.

But the motor only coughed and sighed and

wheezed like an old man with the asthma, and the boat still drifted.

They called, they blew on the compressed air whistle until all the reserve supply of oxygen was exhausted from the tank, and then they had to resort to their voices again.

"Well, there's one thing left," answered Jack, tragically.

"What is it?" begged Ed.

"We can swim for it. That's better than being carried out to sea. Let's swim before it is too late."

"That's what I say!" exclaimed Dray. "Let the *Dixie* go—she's no good!"

The others were considering Jack's startling proposal, when Ed looked up, and exclaimed:

"Hark! Don't you hear something?"

The others listened. Faintly from the direction of the sea came a sound—unmistakable.

"A boat!" cried Jack. "I'll not take off my coat yet."

"A motor boat, too," added Ed.

"And coming this way," went on Walter.

"Come on, fellows, give 'em a hail!" suggested Dray.

Up to now, with all their shouting and blowing of the whistle, they had neither seen nor heard of a craft. They had drifted too far out. If any had come within hearing distance the occupants

had paid no heed to the calls for help. Now there was one approaching, that was evident.

"All together, now!" called Jack, and they united their voices in a shout.

"There are her lights!" called Dray.

"Yes, and she's heading right over here," agreed Ed.

A little later the red and green lights came nearer.

Then, as the craft surged up to the stalled Dixie, and came to a stop, the engine still running with the clutch thrown out, a voice asked:

"Do you fellows want a tow?"

"Do we?" came in a chorus. "We don't want anything any more."

"Fling us your rope," was the curt order.

Unexpected help had arrived. But it was too late.

CHAPTER XXIV

DENNY'S SOLILOQUY

"WHAT shall we do?" asked Cora, in a whisper.

"It is rather a puzzle," admitted Bess.

The motor girls were standing outside Denny Shane's cabin, looking in on him as he sat at his ease, with the red oar over his knees.

"He doesn't seem to be in any danger," went on Cora.

"No, those men either haven't harmed him, or they haven't arrived yet," returned Belle.

"Oh, but suppose they should come while we are here?" suggested Marita, shrinking against Cora.

"Don't go to supposing such uncanny things," objected Cora, as she put her arm about the other.

"Are you afraid?"

"I don't know," was the hesitating answer. "I suppose one ought to be afraid, coming at night to a cabin where some horrible men are expected. And yet, somehow, I don't seem to be," replied

Marita. "I know I would have been a few months ago, but since I have met you girls, and seen the things you do, why it's queer, but really I—I rather like it!" and she laughed.

"See what your influence has done," whispered Cora.

They had all spoken in low tones, for Denny was sometimes sharp of hearing, and they did not want to arouse him.

The girls were really puzzled, not only at the peaceful surroundings at Denny's cabin, but at the absence of the boys. Of course they could not know that Jack and the others had been there and gone, not finding Denny at home. Nor did they know anything of the note left pinned to the door.

"Do you suppose it could all be over?" asked Lottie.

"All over? What do you mean?" asked Cora.

"I mean could the men have been here, and been captured by the boys and taken to jail?"

"Oh, it's possible, but not very probable," returned Cora. "They surely would have managed to get some word to us if anything like that had happened."

"But what are we going to do?" asked Bess. "We ought not to stay here."

"No, I suppose not," admitted Cora, slowly. "It might be a good thing, though, just to stop and speak to Denny. Then we'd know, soon

enough, what had happened. Suppose we do that?"

The others agreed. They had stepped away from the window for a moment, but now Cora walked toward it again. Denny was still holding the oar, but he must have gotten up, for the window was now partly open, and it had not been so at first.

Denny was talking to himself. He was indulging in a soliloquy, apparently addressing himself to the oar.

"If you could only talk," he said, "if you could only talk, what a tale you could tell. Yes, indeed!" and he sighed. "A tale of the sea and the land—of calm and storms."

"He's very poetical; isn't he?" whispered Bess.

"Hush!" cautioned Cora. "Listen to what he says."

Denny was evidently in a talking mood, and was living the past over again.

"If only Grandfather Lewis were here, what tales he could tell, too," Denny went on. "And there's one tale I'd be glad to listen to. He could tell where the land papers were. If only I could find 'em everything would be all right, and the factory men—ha! we could laugh in our sleeves at 'em. Laugh in our sleeves! Ha! Ha! No, we could laugh in their faces, so we could; couldn't we?"

He held up the oar, speaking to it as one might to a favorite dog.

Denny swung it above his head, as though testing it's weight as a club.

" 'Twas so he swung it the night of the storm—the night he saved my life!" murmured Denny.

" My, what a night that was! What a night! "

He seemed lost in recollection for a moment, and then resumed his self-communion.

" 'Twas so he held it—held it out to me in the smother of foam and spray when I was goin' under. And what was it he said?

" 'Grab holt!' says he. 'Grab holt and I'll pull you in. Don't be afraid, the oar is strong!' And so it is—a grand, strong oar. As strong as old Len Lewis himself. What a grand old man he was! A fine old man!

" But he's gone, and we all have to go. I'll have to go with the rest, I suppose. But before I do go I wish I could find them land papers. What in the world did Grandfather Lewis do with 'em anyhow?

" They must be around here. He ought to have kept 'em in the bank, or in a strong box; but he was always like that. Hidin' his things away in curious places. He even did it with his tobacco. A strange man!

" But I'll wager the papers aren't far from the land. That would be his way—to keep the papers

near the land. 'A place for everything and everything in its place,' he used to say. What more natural than that he'd have the papers near the land?

"I wonder, though, did he stick 'em anywhere around me cabin? He come over here often enough to sit and chat. Ah, many's the good old talk we used to have—a talk of the old days. Often I'd come in from me boat, and find him here. He might have brought the papers an' hid 'em here when I was out. I wonder if he did?"

Denny looked around his simple cabin. He laid the oar down gently, as a thing revered. He walked about the room, looking in various places.

"No, the papers wouldn't be here," he mused. "I'd have found them before this. And those fellows, who came and upset my place when I wasn't home—they'd have found 'em if they was here. I wonder what Grandfather Lewis did with them papers?"

It was a puzzle that others than Denny Shane would have given much to solve.

Cora and her chums looked at one another in the moonlight outside Denny's cabin. His talk had revealed something to them, but there was no clue to the missing papers which could prove the title of Mrs. Lewis to the valuable land.

"Well, there's one thing sure, Denny hasn't been attacked as yet," whispered Bess. "And the

boys haven't been here to warn him, or he'd show some signs of it."

"I think you're right," agreed Cora. "What had we better do? Tell him ourselves?"

"That's what I say—let's warn him," suggested Belle.

The girls started for the cabin door, but paused midway as they heard the approach of a motor boat near the fisherman's little dock.

"Wait," suggested Cora. "That may be the boys now."

CHAPTER XXV

THE PLOTTERS ARRIVE

"WHAT's the trouble?" asked one of the four men in the boat that had come to the rescue of Jack and his chums. "Engine broken, or are you out of gasoline?"

"We've got gas, but there may be water in it," replied Dray. "I watched the fellow when he filled the tank, though, and he used the chamois all right."

"You can't always go by that," said another of the accommodating strangers. "There's an awful sight of poor gasoline being palmed off nowadays. Have you got a long rope?"

"We sure have," answered Jack. "It's mighty good of you to stop and give us a tow."

"That's all right," laughed one of the men. "We never can tell when we might want a helping hand ourselves. Pass us the rope."

It was flung over. The two boats were now bobbing side by side, for they were well out in the bay, and the sea was quite choppy. The tide was

running out, and help had come to the boys not any too soon.

The rope, passing from the bow of the *Dixie*, where it was made fast to a ring bolt in the deck, was caught on to a cleat in the stern of the other boat.

"You'll look after the steering; will you?" asked one of the men.

"Surely," answered Dray.

"Because there's nothing harder than towing a boat that yaws from side to side," the man went on.

"We'll keep a straight course," declared the owner of the speedy boat that had proved such a disappointment of late. "We know something about gasoline craft."

"Glad to hear it," remarked one of the occupants of the rescuing boat, in a grumbling sort of voice. "There's so many launched on the bay now, with a lot of chaps running them who don't know any more than to turn on the gasoline and switch on the spark."

"And girls, too," added another of the men. "Though I must say there are some girls here who——"

"Easy there!" called one of the rescuers sharply.

He might have been speaking to his companion, who was attending to the fastening of the towing

rope, but to Jack it seemed as though there was an injunction to be careful of what was said.

Somehow or other, though why he could not tell, Jack's suspicions were aroused. He tried to get a good look at the faces of the men, but the moon was hidden behind some clouds just then, and it was out of the question. The light was too baffling.

"Well, I guess we're ready," announced the man who was making fast the towing rope. "Now where do you fellows want to go? We can't promise to take you home, as we have some business of our own to attend to."

Jack always said, afterward, that nothing could have been more providential than the way the moon shone out brightly just as he was about to reply.

He had it on the tip of his tongue to ask that, if possible, they be landed near Denny's cabin, when a ray of moonlight glinted on the name of the rescuing boat, painted on her stern. There Jack read the word:

Pickerel.

"Great Scott!" he almost ejaculated aloud. "The boat that raced with Cora! The same men who are after old Denny!"

Jack made up his mind in a flash. It would never do for the men to know that he and his

friends were on their way to save Denny from the very fate the men had in store for him.

"Oh, if you can land us anywhere near Buler's Pavilion, it will answer," said Jack, naming a place not far from the entrance to the bay, and not far from where they were at that moment.

"Buler's Pavilion!" cried Ed. "Why that's——"

"It's probably closed, by this time, I know that!" answered Jack, quickly, giving Ed a sly kick. "But we can get somebody up, I guess."

Then, in a tense whisper he hissed into Ed's ear:

"These are the men after Denny. I know them by their boat. Don't let on who we are. We're going to Buler's."

"Sure, we can rouse somebody up if they are closed," answered Ed, quickly falling in with Jack's scheme. "That will do us, all right," he added to the men. "That is, if it won't be too much out of your way."

"Not at all," said one. "We'll be glad to leave you there. Maybe you can find somebody to fix your boat. All ready?"

"Let her go," said Jack. He wanted the *Pickerel* to get far enough ahead so that he could talk to his chums without the danger of being overheard.

The engine of the rescuing boat was set going

more rapidly, and the clutch was thrown in. The craft forged ahead, and soon the *Dixie* was under way again. She was being brought back from the sea which had so nearly claimed her, and in a strange manner.

"Why did you want to say we'd like to be landed at Buler's?" asked Dray of Jack.

"Because I want to fool these fellows," and Jack quickly told how he had seen the name of the boat that had raced with his sister's. "If we do land there," he went on, "they won't know who we are. We can tell them to cut us off before we get to the dock, in case the place should happen to be open and lighted up. Then they can't see us."

"Good idea," said Dray. "You're a wise boy, Jack."

"I just saw that name in time," went on Cora's brother. "Otherwise it would have been all up with us."

"But what about Denny?" asked Ed. "How are we going to save him if we land at Buler's, and let these fellows go on?"

"I've thought of that," answered Jack. "We'll have to get another boat, if we can, and go to Denny's cabin in her. The *Dixie* is no good. Oh, excuse me!" he said quickly to Dray. "I didn't mean that—exactly."

"It's all right, old man, the *Dixie* is certainly

no good to-night. Say all you please about her, you can't hurt my feelings."

"If only the *Reliance* is at Buler's we can get her and go to the cabin flying," went on Jack. "If not, we'll do the best we can. Maybe Denny can stand them off until we arrive."

"Say, what's the matter with up and telling these fellows we know who they are, and who we are," suggested Walter. "We can tell them we know what they're up to, and threaten them. Won't that stop them from bothering Denny—at least to-night?"

"Not a bit of it," returned Jack, quickly. "Do you know what they'd do as soon as they found out who we were?"

"What?" asked Ed.

"They'd know at once we were working against them, and they'd cut us adrift. Then we would be out of it. And I haven't any desire," added Jack, with a shrug of his shoulders, "to go out to sea again."

"We land at Buler's," said Walter, decidedly.

And a little later they landed at that resort, which had closed unusually early, for some reason.

"All right—cast off!" Jack had called as they neared the dock, and the *Dixie*, with trailing rope, ran up to it under her own momentum, while the other craft swung off into the darkness, the boys calling their thanks to the men.

"And if they only knew who it was they had given a tow to!" chuckled Walter.

"They'll know, soon enough," replied Jack. "We've got to look up a boat to take us to Denny Shane's. We've simply got to get there."

And while the boys were thus looking for a boat to take the place of the disabled *Dixie*, the plotters, in their swift *Pickerel*, were hastening toward the little cove where the fisherman's cabin stood.

The men in the boat were Moran, the slow-moving character whom Cora had seen in the store; Bruce, the "society" chap; Kelly, a blunt and unscrupulous Irishman, who handled the money for the factory interests, and a man to run the boat. He had been brought in at the last minute.

"We lost a lot of time, towing those chumps," grumbled Moran, as the *Pickerel* forged ahead.

"Well, we were early," said Bruce. "I've had a man keeping watch on Shane's shack, and he was late getting in. He telephoned to me. It's just as well to let Shane get a bit settled before we tackle him. He was out fishing until long after dark."

Then the engineer slowed down the powerful motor as they came up to the dock.

It was this sound that Cora and her chums heard.

CHAPTER XXVI

CORA'S BRAVE RESOLVE

WHEN the girls heard Cora's remark, that the approaching motor boat might contain the boys, Lottie said:

"Oh, we're all right now!" and she sighed in relief.

"How much you depend on them!" observed Belle, in a low voice. "When you've been with us a little longer you'll learn that we can do almost as well by ourselves."

"But I am glad the boys have arrived," agreed Cora. "I never was so pleased to know that they were on hand."

But a moment later, as they saw the forms of four men leaving the motor boat, which had been made fast to the dock, Cora shrank back, at the same time whispering a warning.

"Girls, something is wrong! Those aren't the boys. Quick, get out of sight!"

She pulled Bess behind a row of bushes, and the others followed silently. They had started down to the beach from the cabin, but fortunately man-

aged to conceal themselves in time. The men, walking up the little slope toward the cabin, had not seen them.

Trembling with nervousness, Cora and her chums awaited the new turn of events. That it would come soon seemed likely, for the men appeared bent on something. They had made fast their boat, and came up the slope openly, as though their errand was the most innocent in the world. The light still glowed in the cabin.

"Oh, Cora!" gasped Marita. "Suppose they do—do something!"

"Which is very likely they will do," replied Cora. "But don't talk—I want to watch."

From behind the screen of bushes Cora watched the men coming forward. The moon still gave a good light, though it was declining in the west.

"Is he there?" Cora heard one of the men ask.

"He seems to be—there's a light going, anyhow," was the answer. "I'd rather found him in bed, but we can't have all we want."

"Oh, where are the boys!" cried Bess, frantically. "Why don't they come?"

"I don't know," answered Cora. "Surely they should have been here. But there must be a good reason why they are not. Jack wouldn't disappoint us."

"Why don't you include Walter and the others?" asked Belle.

"Of course you know I meant them," Cora retorted. "I can't understand it—really I can't."

"Perhaps they are in hiding," ventured Lottie.

"They'd have been out before this, if they were," declared Cora.

There came a sudden knock. It was one of the men striking on the door of Denny's cabin. From their hiding place in the bushes the girls heard it plainly.

"Listen!" whispered Cora.

They heard the voice of the old fisherman call:

"Who's there? What do you want at this time of night?"

"We've come to see you," was answered in tones Cora recognized as those of the young man who had raced with her.

"What about?" inquired Denny. "I have no fish to sell."

"And we don't want fish," was the retort. "Come, Shane, open your door. We want to talk to you. It's important, and there may be something in it for you."

"Yes—trouble, more or less. I can't see anything else," was the grumbling response. "Wait a minute."

Cora looked over the bushes. She could see the men grouped in front of the cabin door. Then she saw it open, and a broad beam of light shoot out.

"Come in," invited Denny, and the plotters entered.

"Now's our chance!" exclaimed Cora, her heart beating rapidly. "We must see what those men do. We may have to give evidence."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Marita. "I never could do it. I'd faint, sure."

"Do what?" asked Cora.

"Give evidence."

"Don't worry. You won't have to do anything hard, dear," was the gentle answer, as Cora slipped her arm about the timid girl.

"Oh, I'll do anything you girls do," was the quick answer. "I want to help."

"And we want your help," whispered Bess. "But, Cora, can't we go closer? We ought to look in and see what happens."

"Brave Bess!" murmured Lottie. "You are certainly coming on finely."

The plotters were now inside the cabin, so that it was safe for the girls to advance. This they did until they were once more in a position where they could look in the window of the cabin.

They saw a strange sight. Old Denny Shane, brave and rugged, confronted the four men who had called on him. In one hand he grasped the red oar, while the other rested on the back of the chair from which he had risen.

"Well, Mr. Shane," said the man Cora knew

as Bruce. "We come to see you on business."

"What kind?" asked the old man, and the girls could see him look around as though seeking help or a means of escape. But there was no fear in his eyes. Only defiance.

"We might as well get to business at once," said one of the men, sharply. That was Kelly.

"That's right," agreed Moran. "Make him an offer. If he doesn't want to take it then we'll talk another kind of talk. And be quick about it."

"I want no business with you!" cried Denny, sharply. "Why do you come here bothering me?"

"You know why!" exclaimed Bruce. "You are concerned in the Lewis land matter. You can testify as to who owns it."

"Well, supposin' I can?" asked the old man, defiantly. "What is that to you?"

"Lots to us, and it may mean a great deal to you, also!" snapped out Kelly. "You may have some papers, too."

"I may," returned Denny, "but you'll not get 'em."

Cora and the others, listening, knew that Denny would only be too glad if he did have the documents in question. But the girls had heard him lamenting that he did not know where they were.

Why did he now let the men think he did know? It was a puzzle to the girls.

"Not get them, eh?" cried Bruce. "That's to

be seen. Now look here, Shane. We came here to do business, and we're going to do it. By fair means if we can, if not——”

He paused suggestively.

“Ah! I know you and your breed!” cried the old fisherman. “By fair means or foul! But try it on! I'm not afraid of you.”

He stepped back a pace, the better to defend himself in case he had to. The red oar was still in his firm hands.

“Now wait a minute,” put in Moran. “We'll try the fair means first. What do you say to that? Show him the bills.”

With a quick gesture Bruce drew out a roll of greenbacks.

“Here you go, Shane!” he exclaimed. “There's a cool hundred here, and it's yours if you testify that the Widow Lewis has no claim on the land. And she hasn't any claim that she can prove. All we want you to testify to is that her husband's father sold the land some time before his death. We'll do the rest.”

“But he didn't sell it!” cried Denny. “It was his on his dyin' day, and it belongs to his son's widder and daughter now. That's the law, an' you know it.”

“She can't prove that the land is hers,” sneered Kelly.

“Maybe she can,” returned Denny, quietly.

"Well, she can't unless you tell what you know," broke in Bruce. "We've found out that much. Now the factory wants that land, and it's going to get it. Here, I'll make it a hundred and fifty if you do as we want you to."

"An' testify to a lie?" cried Denny.

"It wouldn't be exactly a lie. Besides, we're willing to pay the widow a small sum."

"Not what the land's worth. That's valuable property," insisted Denny, "and it will keep her in her old age if she manages right. Be off with you! I'll stick to the Widder Lewis, so I will. Be off!" and he motioned them to the door. "You wouldn't have got this close if it hadn't been that my dog was dead. Be off!"

"Not so fast," Cora and her chums heard Bruce say. "We haven't said all we intend to."

"Oh, I'm sure something will happen now," quavered Bess.

"Hush," cautioned Cora. "We must do something!"

"Do something?" questioned Marita. "Oh, why don't the boys come?"

Cora and her chums were close to the cabin now. They could look in the door, and through the uncurtained window, and see plainly all that went on. They could also hear plainly, for the men and old Denny spoke loudly. And, as yet, the girls had not been noticed.

"Now, look here!" said Bruce, and there was a snarl in his voice. "This is our last offer, Shane. Either you take the hundred and fifty dollars, and testify the way we want you to, or we'll find means to make you, and you won't get the money. And I'll say this, that we'll treat the Widow Lewis as fair as we can."

"Which won't be fair at all!" burst out Denny. "Not at all!"

"Well, what's your answer?" cried Kelly. "We can't stay here all night. Give him the money, Bruce. When he feels it he'll hate to let it go."

Bruce held out the roll of bills. To the surprise of Cora and the girls the fisherman took them. Was he going to betray Freda and her mother?

The next instant they knew Denny for the brave-souled man he was.

"That's me answer!" he cried, throwing the bills in the face of Bruce. "Take your evil money and get out. I'll stick to the widder!"

For a moment the men were nonplussed. Then, with an angry exclamation, Bruce started forward.

"Come, girls," said Cora, "we've got to go to the aid of Denny. For some reason the boys aren't here. We've got to save him!" and with this brave resolve she moved toward the cabin.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE RED OAR AGAIN

"CORR KIMBALL, what are you going to do?" gasped Lottie, trying to hold back her chum.

"I'm going to go to Denny's aid. Why shouldn't I? It's four to one, but even if we are girls we can perhaps turn the tide in his favor."

"Oh, Cora, I don't dare!" admitted Belle.

"Nor I," added her plump sister. "I'll faint if you go in where those horrid men are."

"Faint if you like," returned Cora, calmly. "Somebody else will have to look after you, then, for I'm going."

"But why?" asked Lottie. "We ought not to interfere when men are going to fight, and I think that's what's going to happen in there."

"That is what's going to happen," said Cora, "but perhaps we can prevent it. For some unknown reason, though the boys promised to come here and defend Denny, they haven't done so. Therefore, it's our place to do it."

"Yes, and I'm going with you!" announced Marita, determinedly.

All this talk had taken but a few seconds of time, and, as it had been in whispers, the men in the cabin had not heard it. The situation, however, was rapidly becoming acute.

With one accord, after Bruce had stepped toward old Denny, the others advanced. They were evidently going to lay violent hands on him. But the sturdy fisherman was not afraid.

"Stand back!" he cried. "Stand back or I'll do you harm—you cowards!"

"No use calling names!" sneered Kelly. "We're here to do you. We made you a fair offer, and you wouldn't take it. Now you'll have to abide by the consequences."

"Get behind him," said Bruce. "I can take him from where I stand."

"Get back! Get out of here!" ordered the old man.

He raised the red oar over his head, threateningly.

"Grab him!" cried Moran. "Grab that oar!"

"You'll get it over the head before you grab it!" threatened Denny. "Mind that, now!"

The fisherman swung his weapon, but he either had not calculated on the length of it, or he forgot that he was nearer to the wall than he had been at first. The blade of the oar caught in a hanging picture, and was entangled in the wire.

Denny, putting all his strength into the blow

he had hoped would disable one of his assailants, was thrown off his balance. He toppled and nearly fell.

"Now we've got him!" yelled Kelly.

The cowardly men, attacking the single fisherman with overwhelming numbers, made a leap forward.

"Stop! Let him alone. We'll call the police!" screamed Cora, and the other girls added their shrill voices to hers. They rushed into the cabin.

"The girls I raced with!" muttered Bruce. "We've no time to fool with them. Don't mind them. Get at Shane!"

"Get at me, is it?" cried the fisherman. He had by this time disentangled the oar from the picture wire. Again he raised it over his head, intending to bring it down on Kelly.

As the red weapon descended Kelly shot up his hand and caught it. He twisted on the oar to wrest it from Denny's grasp, and the two suddenly went to the floor, jarring the whole cabin.

And at that instant there was a sound of splintering, breaking wood. Some red slivers flew out from between the two prostrate men who were struggling for possession of the weapon.

"The red oar! It's broken!" cried Denny. "Me old red oar, that saved me life in the hands of Grandfather Lewis! The red oar is broken, bad luck to you! Cowards that you are!"

The girls were screaming, but even Cora, brave as she was, dared go no nearer to the two desperately struggling men. Bruce and Moran were seeking an opening that they might get hold of Denny. The fourth man had gone back to the boat, seemingly. He had leaped out of the window as the girls entered.

The cabin was a place of wild excitement.

"Get that oar away from him!" cried Bruce. "Here's some rope. Tie him up, and then we'll get what we want out of him!"

"Don't you dare hurt him!" screamed Cora.

"Ah, would you?" gasped Denny, as he rolled out from under Kelly, who had sought to pass a rope about the old man's wrists. "I'm not down and out yet!" he panted. "The red oar is broken, but I've got the best end yet."

He staggered to his feet, holding the handle of the red oar. One end was splintered where it had been broken from the blade.

"Come on! I'm not afraid!" yelled Denny. "Come on. You girls had better leave—there's going to be trouble!"

"We won't go! Help is on the way. The boys are coming!" cried Cora, though she did not know when Jack and the others would arrive.

"Oh, if they were only here now! When we need them so!" gasped Lottie.

Again Denny swung what was left of the red

oar around his head. He aimed a blow at the face of Bruce, but it fell short and struck the man on the shoulder.

Then a strange thing happened. The handle of the oar split lengthwise, and from a hollow place inside there flew out a roll of papers, yellow with age. And on one of them was a red seal—a legal-looking seal.

Bruce staggered at the blow, and a strange look came over his face. It might have been that he was dazed, but his eyes lighted on the roll of papers that had fallen to the floor. There they lay—a curious roll that had come from the secret crevice in the red oar.

The struggle had come to a sudden end. The girls ceased screaming and stood looking on dumbly, unable to understand what had happened.

As for the men they, too, seemed startled by the strange turn of events. Kelly rose to his feet, and was creeping up on Denny from behind. His arms were outstretched, and his fingers worked convulsively, as though they would like to close about the fisherman's throat, and force him to testify as the plotters desired.

Cora wanted to scream a warning, but some strange force seemed to hold her dumb.

"The red oar—it's broken—broken! Me old red oar, that saved me life!" murmured Denny

Shane. "But I never knew 'twas hollow. Never! I wonder did Grandfather Lewis——"

He did not complete the sentence, for at that instant Bruce leaped forward and caught up the roll of yellow papers from the floor.

"Give me those!" cried Denny leaping at him with the jagged piece of the red oar in his gnarled hands—the hands that had, so many years ago, grasped the same oar in what was little short of a death-grip. "Give me those papers!" fairly roared Denny. "I don't know what they are, but they're not yours. Give 'em to me!"

"Give you these! I guess not!" sneered Bruce. "They are just what we want—the land papers. They're the only ones by which the widow could prove her shadowy claim to the property, and with them out of the way it's all clear sailing for us.

"This is the luckiest thing that could have happened for us! The breaking of the red oar came at the right time. Kelly, give me a match and we'll make a little bonfire of these same papers."

"Don't you dare!" cried Denny, and, making a leap forward he snatched from Kelly's hands the precious documents that had so strangely come from the secret hiding place in the red oar.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE DISCOVERY—CONCLUSION

WILD with rage the three men with one accord made a leap for Denny Shane. But the old fisherman was not to be easily taken. Holding the precious papers close to him, he made a jump for a corner of the room, where hung an old musket.

"Oh, he's going to shoot!" screamed Bess.

"And small blame to him if he did," declared Cora. "Oh, those men must not destroy those papers, if I have to take them in charge myself!"

Denny Shane had reached the corner where hung his musket. It was not loaded. Cora knew this, for the old fisherman had said he was always afraid of some accident happening, and he never kept a charge in the gun. It was for the effect of it, he said, that he had it hanging on his wall. Now it would be useful as a club, at least—more useful than the easily shattered red oar had been.

But before Denny could reach the gun Kelly was upon him. With a fierce motion the desperate plotter grasped the fisherman around the neck.

Holding him thus with one arm, he snatched the papers from him with his other hand.

"Here you go!" Kelly cried to Bruce. "Take the papers while I hold him. Burn 'em if you want to, but be sure you do the job well! Then we'd better get out of here. I think I hear a boat coming. This place will soon be too hot for us!"

Bruce took the papers from his crony. Hastily scanning them, to make sure he had the right ones, he struck a match that Moran handed him.

Kelly and Denny were struggling in the corner of the room. But poor old Denny had not much strength left. The events of the night had been too much for him, and he was giving way under the cruel pressure of Kelly's arms.

"These are the very papers we want—or don't want, rather!" exulted Bruce. "With them out of the way the property is ours."

The match flickered in his fingers.

"Don't you dare burn them!" cried Cora.

One corner of the papers had caught fire.

Then from without the cabin sounded a chorus of cries.

"Come on, fellows!"

"We're just in time!"

"The girls are here ahead of us!"

"What a night!"

They were the voices of Jack and his chums.

"Oh, the boys have come! The boys have come!" cried Lottie.

"Jack! Jack! In here! Quick!" screamed Cora. "He's burning the papers! Get them from him!"

Into the cabin, already crowded, the boys flung themselves.

"Just in time!" cried Cora, motioning to Jack. "Get those papers from him before they burn!"

Over in the corner poor Denny had fallen unconscious under the attack of Kelly.

"Cut it and run!" advised Moran, making for the door.

"No, you don't!" shouted Walter, blocking it. "Guard the windows, Dray—Ed!" he called.

"The papers! The papers!" voiced Cora. "Get them before they burn, or Mrs. Lewis will lose the land!"

"I'll get them!" shouted Jack.

He flung himself upon Bruce as he had often flung himself upon a player in tackling him on the football field.

"Look out for yourself!" threatened Bruce.

But Jack was not afraid. He twisted himself about Bruce, and sought to reach the papers.

Bruce, to get them out of Jack's reach, held them high in the air, over his head. The two were struggling. Moran and Kelly were wrestling with Ed and Walter, while the other girls

cowered behind Dray, who had caught up a chair as a weapon.

Cora saw her chance. She slipped around behind Bruce, and with a leap that had often enabled her to outwit an opponent in playing basket ball, the plucky motor girl snatched the papers from the man's hand. Full and clean was her jump, and the smouldering papers came away in her grasp.

"I have them, Jack!" she cried. "Look out for the men!"

And with that, to make sure that she would not lose the precious documents, Cora held them tightly under her arm and ran out of the cabin door, after putting out the little blaze.

"All over!" cried Jack, putting out his foot, and tripping up Bruce, who aimed a savage blow at him. "All over!"

Bruce went down heavily. At the same time, from without the cabin there flashed several lights, and the voices of men were heard asking:

"What's going on here?"

"Who's been screaming?"

The plotters gathered together. Bruce leaped from the floor.

"Come on!" he cried desperately. "It's all up. Get away!"

He leaped out of the window, followed by the other two.

"Get them!" yelled Ed.

"No, let them go—it's the easiest way," advised Jack. "Cora has the papers."

"But maybe they've hurt Denny!" said Walter.

"I'm all right," asserted the fisherman, as he slowly arose. "He just cut off my wind for a minute. I'm all right. But where are the papers?" and he looked about the floor, on which were scattered pieces of the broken red oar.

"They're safe," answered Jack. "Cora, my sister, has them. Guess we'd better look for her though."

There was no need, as Cora, holding the papers in her hand, re-entered the cabin at that moment. Only one edge of the legal documents was burned, and no real harm had been done.

While the motor girls, and the boys and the neighboring men, who had come to the rescue all but too late, were looking at one another there was heard, at the dock, the puffing of a motor boat.

"There they go!" exclaimed Walter.

"Well, that's the best way," said Jack. "We're glad to get rid of them."

"How did you girls get here?" asked Ed.

"How was it you boys *didn't* get here?" demanded Cora, still panting from her exertions.

Explanations were then in order. I will be as brief with them as I can. How the girls came to

go to the cabin is already known. And how the boys, foolishly perhaps, went out on the bay while waiting for Denny to come back, and how they became stalled, is likewise known to my readers.

In the meanwhile Denny came to his cabin.

Then came the unexpected help in the shape of a tow from the plotters themselves.

"They left us at Buler's," said Jack, "and then we had our own troubles. We tried to get a boat to come on, for the *Dixie* still refused to mote. But we couldn't get one for love or money, and it was too rough to row."

"What did you do?" asked Cora, looking at Denny, who was examining the broken red oar.

"We hired a horse and carriage, and came around the land way," replied Walter. "It took us a long time, too, for we missed the road."

"But we finally got here," spoke Ed.

"And just in time," added Cora. "We were wild about you—couldn't imagine what happened."

"Didn't you get the note we left pinned to the door?" asked Dray of Denny.

"Nary a note," he said.

Later it was found where it had blown into a clump of bushes. So that accounted for Denny's not being warned in time.

"But everything seems to be coming out right," said Cora, with a rather wintry smile. All the

girls were pale, and a trifle weak. The boys, too, were tired.

"And what are those papers?" asked Jack, taking them from Cora.

"Those prove Mrs. Lewis's title to the land the plotters tried to get," she said. "Oh, I'm so glad we found them."

"Who found them?" asked Walter, giving Cora's hand a surreptitious squeeze.

"They were in the red oar," said Denny. "And to think I never knew it! They were there all these years, and all of us worrying about them and wondering where they were. But I understand now. Grandfather Lewis must have hollowed out a hole in the handle, hid the papers in it, and then plugged it up. Then he gave the oar to me to keep. I remember well at the time he said it would prove valuable some day. I often wondered what made the oar lighter than it had been. It was because it was hollowed out.

"I asked him what he meant by sayin' the oar was valuable, but he kept puttin' me off. He said he'd tell me some time, but he never did. Then the day he died he sent for me, and was trying to tell me, I guess, but he couldn't. I remember I wondered what was on his mind, but he was too weak to explain. So he died with his secret, and the red oar had it and kept it all these years.

"But the oar broke, or those men and myself

broke it between us, and the papers fell out. Now the widder will get her rights."

And the Widow Lewis did. Leaving the valuable documents with Denny, the motor girls and the boys went back to their stopping places—the girls to the bungalow, the boys to the tent.

And such a time as Cora and her chums had in telling the good news to Mrs. Lewis and Freda! The latter could hardly believe it at first.

"Oh, how can we ever thank you!" cried Freda, as, with tears in her eyes, she embraced Cora.

"Don't try," was the whispered answer.

And so everything came out right after all. The papers so oddly hidden in the red oar proved the widow's title to the valuable land beyond the shadow of a doubt. As for the plotters, they were not seen again in that part of the country. They realized that the sharp trick they had tried to play had failed, thanks to the activities of Cora and her friends.

Mrs. Lewis easily established her claim to the land, moved back to her cottage, and the project of spoiling the public park was abandoned. The factory company was beaten in court and the members of the corporation were forced to pay heavy costs.

Old Denny came in for his share of credit, and he was very happy. His one lament was that the red oar was broken, but he managed to patch it

together, after a fashion. And the motor girls got him another dog.

The opening by which the papers had been put in the hollow handle had been cleverly concealed, and, only for the accidental breaking of the oar, might never have been discovered.

It had probably been the intention of Grandfather Lewis to disclose the secret hiding place of the land papers, but he had died before he could do this.

"But 'all's well that ends well,' " quoted Cora the next day, at a late breakfast. "We have done a little good here by our vacation at Crystal Bay."

"A *little* good!" exclaimed Freda. "I never can thank you enough, Cora."

"And we'll soon have to go back home—that's the worst of it!" sighed Lottie. "It is so lovely here!"

"Oh, well, we can come back next year," spoke Bess.

"And then, too, Winter's coming on—something is sure to happen then," added Belle. "Something always does."

And what did happen that Winter will be told of in the volume to follow this, which will be called "The Motor Girls on Waters Blue; Or, The Strange Cruise of the *Tartar*."

It was the next day. The girls disposed themselves about the bungalow in picturesque attitudes,

and the boys sat on the broad porch, telling over again the adventures of the night.

"There's only one point we're shy on," said Jack, when everything had been told and retold.

"And that's what?" asked Ed.

"We haven't found out yet who the strange woman was who tried to get information out of Freda, and who sent her the 'phone message."

"Oh, we're just as well off without knowing that," said Cora. "I'm sure she was in with the plotters. You know that man Bruce called her 'Confidence Kate,' as if he knew her well."

"You must have been terribly frightened, when you found out there was no way of getting home from the Junction," said Marita. "I think I should have gone out of my mind."

"Don't believe her, Freda," laughed Cora, putting her arm around the timid girl. "Marita is braver than she thinks. She offered to go into the cabin with me when those horrid men were there, and none of the others would."

"Come on over to Buler's and see 'em dance," proposed Jack. "The *Dixie* is running again."

"We'll go in the *Chelton*," spoke Cora firmly, and in that boat they went. And now for a time, we will take leave of the motor girls.

THE END

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